

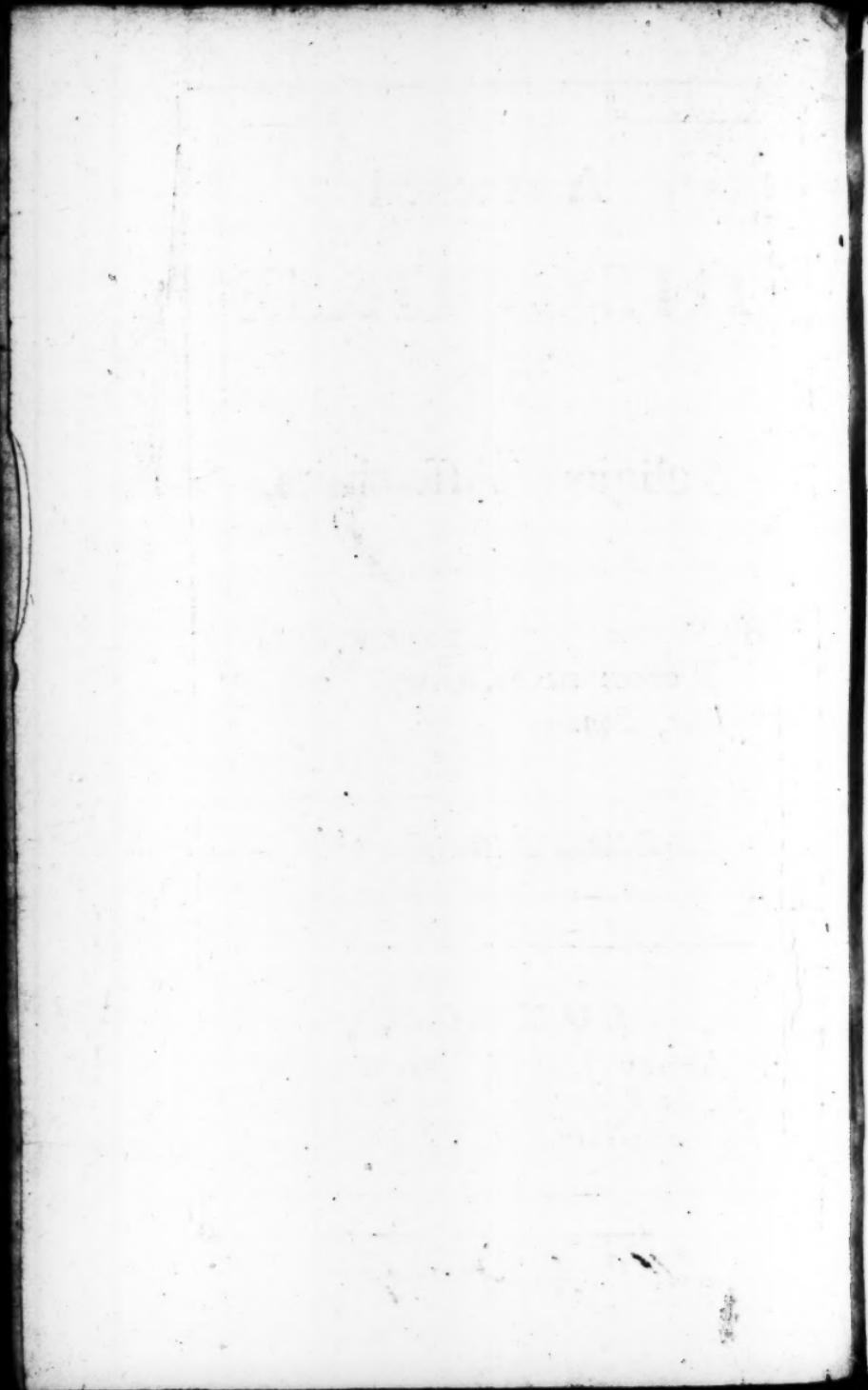
A Practical
DISCOURSE
O F
Religious Assemblies.

By WILL. SHERLOCK, D.D.
Rector of St. George Botolph-
lane, London.

The Second Edition Corrected.

L O N D O N,
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Arthur Blaxford





The Preface.

To his Beloved Parishioners, the Inhabitants of St. George Botolph-lane, and St. Botolph-Billings-gate, Grace, Peace, and Truth be multiplied.

My Friends and Brethren,

I hope we are all sensible of that great Account we must shortly give to God of all our Actions, which obliges us, as we love our Souls, to take care, both to know our Duty, and to practise it; neither to suffer our selves to be byassed by Interest, Prejudice, and Partiality in our Inquiries after Truth, which is the common cause of many dangerous Mistakes in Religion; nor to be overborn by any

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impetuous Lusts and Passions, to the neglect or violation of it.

That Relation I stand in to you, makes me concerned, as I love my own Soul, to take care of yours; and though there are many Men fitted with greater Abilities for the discharge of so weighty an Office; yet I thank God, I cannot charge my self with any wilful neglect, either in informing my self, or instructing you. I am as careful as I can not to mistake my self, and resolutely honest not to conceal any part of your Duty from you, though in this Age plain and free dealing meets with no great encouragement.

The greatest hindrance I have in the exercise of my Ministry among you, is, That many of you, who are as much bound to attend my Instructions, as I am to instruct you, and must as certainly give an account of your neglect, as I must of mine, do yet either wholly, or in part, withdraw your selves

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selves from your Parish Church, and make it in that way impossible for me to discharge this Duty to you.

And therefore that I might not be wholly wanting in my Duty to you, I have sent this little Book to wait on you at your Houses, and to invite you to our Communion, to convince you of the evil of such a Neglect, and to remove those Mistakes and Prejudices which have kept you at a distance.

And since some of you, who do not forsake my Ministry, are yet guilty of other Neglects, which are of very dangerous consequence, especially the neglect of the Holy Supper of our Lord, I have here admonished you of your Duty, and offered the most prevailing Considerations, I could think of, to persuade you to it.

And now I hope you cannot take it ill, if I endeavour to make this Discourse, which was designed for your Instruction, as generally useful as

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might be, and took a larger scope than I hope had been necessary, had it been calculated only for your private use; since I would not have you, nor the World think, that I charge you with all those Faults and Miscarriages which I there reprove; but there are too many, who are called Christians, guilty of them all, and possibly this Book may fall into the hands of some such Men; and if it does, I pray God they may find the benefit of such plain, but seasonable Instructions.

But whatever other Men do, I think, I may in reason and justice expect from you, that you will vouchsafe to read and consider this Discourse. I have contrived it to be as plain and easy as I could; but yet I fear some things may not be fitted to every Capacity; for as there are different degrees of Knowledg among Men, so I did not scrupulously confine my self to the lowest, being, as St. Paul speaks,

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speaks, A Debtor to all Men, to the Wise, and to the Unwise; And therefore if any of you find any thing above your reach, do not presently fling the Book away, for you will find those things, which are of most general concernment, fitted to very ordinary Understandings.

If you meet with any thing, which you may think sharp or severe, God is my Witness, that I have no design to anger any Man in it, and therefore have carefully avoided all unnecessary Severities; but there are some severe Truths, which yet must in many cases be spoken, if we would do any good: And those Patients who will not endure the severity of a Cure, must perish under more gentle Remedies.

I only beg this requital of my pains and care of you, That if you have any Objections against what is offered, if you meet with any thing you do not

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understand, you would consult me in it ; if you are offended at any thing, let me know it first, before you publish it to others : and if you have nothing to oppose, have a care of resisting the Evidence of Truth, but comply with your Duty, and rejoice that you are delivered from any Mistakes. I beseech God give you a good understanding in all Things, and Hearts obedient to the Truth, and preserve you blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Which is the hearty prayer of

Your faithful Friend and Servant

in the Gospel of Christ,

W. Sherlock.

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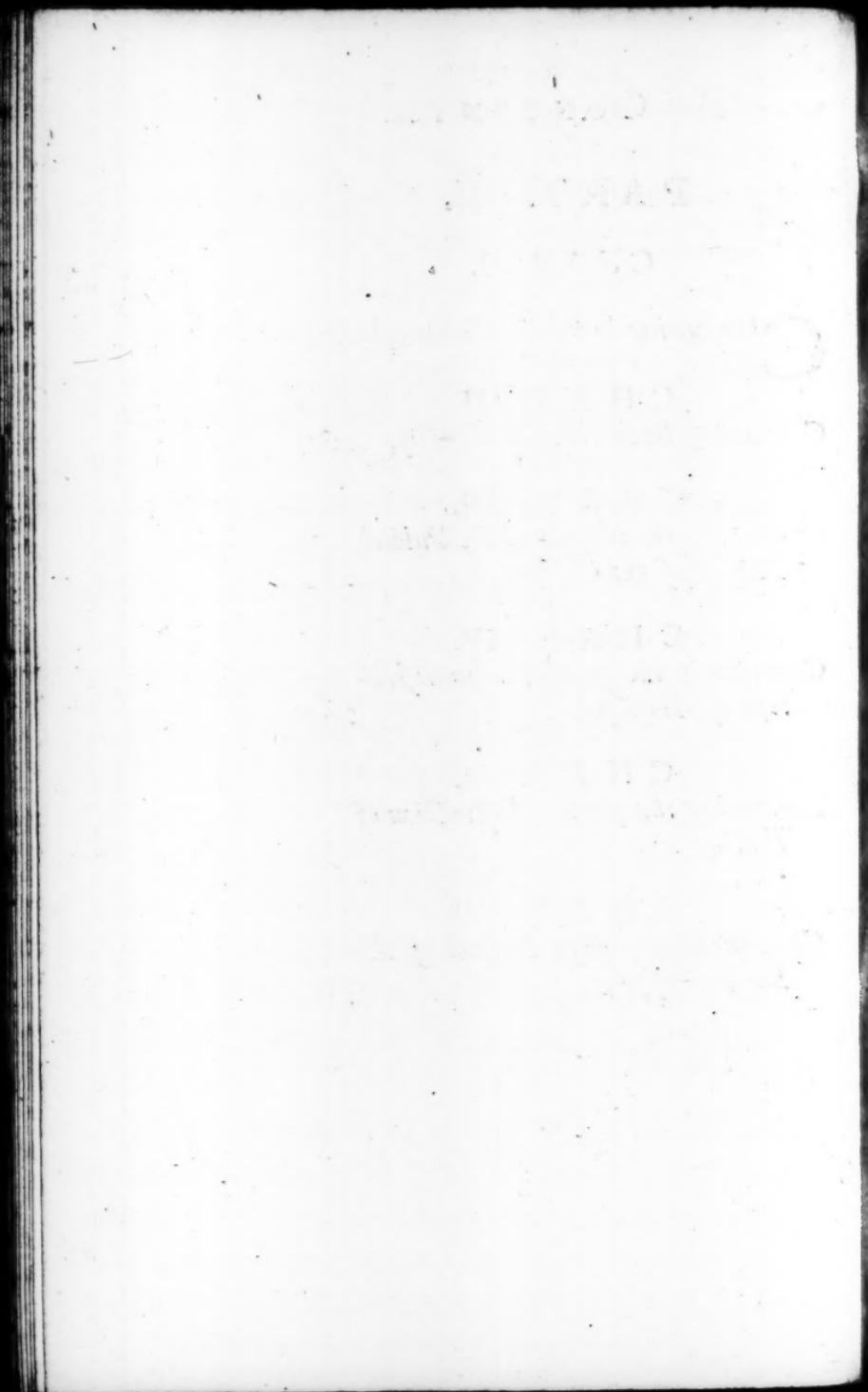
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Practical Discourse O F Religious Assemblies.

The INTRODUCTION.

1. Containing a short Account of the nature of Christian Assemblies for Publick Worship.
2. A Scheme of the Design of this following Treatise.
3. The seasonableness of such a Discourse.

RELIGION is the greatest Concernment of Mankind, both with respect to this life and the next; and the Worship of God is the most excellent part of Religion, as having God, the most excellent being, for its immediate Object: This is the Work and constant

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Employment of Angels, and blessed Spirits in Heaven, who see the Face of God, dwell in his Presence, admire his essential Glory, and infinite Perfections, and sing Eternal Hallelujah's to Him. When we come to Heaven, we shall have no unruly Passions and Appetites to govern ; and tho our Souls shall be transformed into a pure Flame of Divine Love, yet there will be no place for the laborious exercise of Charity, in pitying and relieving one another ; where all the Inhabitants shall be perfectly happy in the enjoyment of the most perfect Good.

Indeed in this World Temperance and Charity are no Christian Virtues, but as they are acts of Worship ; that is, as they flow from a great sense of God, and veneration for him : for God is the sole Object of Religion ; and to be sober, and to be charitable upon some meaner Considerations, without any respect to God, as the last end of all, is to serve our selves or our Friends, or to follow the Inclinations of our Nature, but is not properly the Service of God.

Whatsoever we do out of a just sense of God, is in some respects an act of Worship,

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Worship; for it is to honour the Deity, which may as effectually be done by Actions, as by Words; verbal Praises are of no value with God, are mere Lip-labour and formal Complements, when they are alone, and produce no answerable Effects in our Lives. This is what the Apostle calls, *a form of Godliness, without the power of it.* Religion is nothing else but such a vital sense of God, as excites in us devout Affections, and discovers it self in a divine and heavenly Conversation.

But yet that which we more strictly call Worship, is the most visible and solemn expression of our Honour for God, when we lift up our Hearts, and our eyes and hands to God in Prayers, Praises, and Thanksgiving; and when it is sincere and hearty, has a powerful influence upon the government of our Lives: For what sincere Worshipper can be so void of all fear of God, as to break his Laws, and contemn his Authority, and despise his Judgments? and therefore that vain and hypocritical semblance of Religion, wherewith some bad Men deceive themselves, and flatter God, is called the *form of Godliness without the power,* it being only an

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external imitation of Religious Worship, without that powerful sense of God, which governs the Lives of truly devout and pious Men.

And as the Worship of God is the most excellent part of Religion, which has the most universal and most powerful influence upon our Lives: So publick Worship is the most excellent Worship, as you shall here more hereafter. Indeed the right and power of holding Publick Assemblies for Worship, is the fundamental right of the Church, whereon all Church-Authority depends, as has been well observed and proved by a * Learned Man of our Church. The Power of the Keys signifies no more, than Authority to take in, and to shut out of the Church; the first is done by Baptism, the second by Church-Censures, the highest of which is Excommunication, which debarreth Men from all parts of Christian Communion.

And therefore the Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, makes forsaking Christian Assemblies, either to be an Apostacy from Christianity, as it was in those days, or at least a fair step towards it: he exhorts those to whom he

* Mr. Thorn-dyke's right of Christian Assemblies.

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writ, to hold fast the profession of their Heb. 10. v. 23
Faith without wavering; that is, to con-
tinue firm and stedfast in the profession
of Christianity, and in order to this,
gives them this Caution, Not forsaking
the assembling of themselves together, as the
manner of some is, but exhorting one an-
other, and so much the more as you see the
day approaching. Which at least suppos-
es, that to forsake the Assemblies of
Christians, does greatly dispose Men to
a final Apostacy, as appears from the
following verses, wherein he urges the
great danger of Apostacy, which had
been nothing to his purpose, had not
Separation at least been the beginning
of it: But if we sin wilfully after that we
have received the knowldg [of the Truth],
there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sin,
but a certain fearful looking for of Venge-
ance, and fiery Indignation, which shall
devour the Adversary. He that despised
Moses's Law, died without Mercy under
two or three Witnesses; of how much sorer
Punishment shall be thought worthy, that
trampleth under foot the Son of God, and
hath counted the Blood of the Covenant,
wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy
thing, and hath done despite unto the Spi-
rit of Grace?

Ver. 26, 27,
28, 29.

The Truth is, whoever carefully examines the state of the Apostolical Churches, according to that account we find of them in the Writings of the Apostles, (and I may add of the succeeding Ages,) from the report of the most Primitive and Apostolical Fathers, will find, that none but Apostates from Christianity (by Apostates, not meaning those who wholly renounced the Name and Profession, but those who renounced the Truth of Christian Doctrine) actually separated from the Communion of the Church.

There were Schisms and Divisions in the Church of *Corinth*, which St. Paul reproves them for; but we do not find that they actually separated into distinct Communions, but contended amongst themselves about the preference of several Apostles, which of them was greatest; *Every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas (or Peter) and I of Christ.* And this seems to be the Case in the second Schism of *Corinth*, in the time of *Clement Romanus*, who writ a Letter to them in the name of the Church of *Rome*, persuading them to Peace, Unity, and Order.

But

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But besides these Schisms in the Church, (which St. Paul makes a great sign of Carnality; *For are ye not carnal? for whereas there is among you Envying, and Strife, and Divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as Men?* For while one faith, I say of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?)

¹ Cor. 3. 3, 4.

There were also Schisms from the Church; as we learn from St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy; *For of this sort are they who creep into Houses* (² Tim. 3. 6, ^{7, 8} who kept Secret and Clandestine Meetings), *and lead captive silly Women, laden with Sins, led away with divers Lusts;* even learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the Truth. *Now as Jannes and Jambres withstand Moses,* so do these also resist the Truth; that is, they opposed themselves against the Apostles of Christ, who were the only Teachers of the true Religion; and were that to the Christian Church, which Moses was to the Jews. Which plainly signifies that they set themselves up against the Apostles, and gathered Churches in opposition to them.

Of such Separatists St. John speaks, whom he calls Antichrists; *they went out from us, because they were not of us;* for

¹ John 2. 18,

^{19.}

B 4 if

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if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be made manifest, that they were not all of us. Where the Apostle expressly affirms, that they went out from them, that is, forsook the Christian Assemblies by which he proves, that they were not of them, i.e. that they did not belong to the same Body and Society, but had entertained such Doctrines, as were destructive to the Christian Faith, for otherwise they would not have separated from the Christian Church.

Now this necessarily supposes, that Christian Communion is so indispensable a Duty, that no Man can lawfully separate from the Christian Church, without at least bringing his Christianity into question; that nothing can reasonably tempt Men to a Separation, but their renouncing some great Article of the Christian Faith, nor can any thing justify a Separation, but such Corruptions, as destroy the Faith once delivered to the Saints; for otherwise there had been no force in the Apostle's Argument to prove that they were corrupt in the Faith from their Separation; They went out from us, because they were

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were not of us: for if they had been of us, no doubt they would have continued with us. So that tho' we should grant, that Schism (as Dr. Owen earnestly contends) signifies no more than Divisions and Contentions among the Members of the same Church, without the breach of Church-Communion, and therefore Separatists are not properly Schismatics: I know not what he gains by this, when Separation in the Apostles days was looked upon as a much greater evil than Schism, and that none but Hereticks, or Apostates from the Truth of Christian Doctrine, were in those days guilty of it; and if the Apostle's Argument holds good, a sinful and cauſeſ Separation can never be own'd without some degree of Apostacy.

It is to no great purpose to dispute the signification of Words, when the difference between things is plain and notorious. But yet there seems to be a manifest difference in Scripture between Schism and Heresie: the first being commonly applied to signify those Divisions which were among Christians in the same Communion; the second, if not always, yet chiefly applied to signify Separation from the Church; for

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for ἀπόστολος properly signifies a Sect, or Party, and ἀπόστολος a Sectarian. Thus Christianity it self, when the Christians united into a distinct Church-Society, was called *Heresy*, or a new Sect, and the *Sect of the Nazarens*. Thus we read of the *Sect of the Sadducees*, and the *Sect of the Pharisees*, where the word ἀπόστολος or *Heresy* is always used.

Acts 24. 14.
& 28. 22.
& 24. 5.
& 5. 17.
& 15. 5.

Acts 21. 20,
21, 22, 23, 24.

1 Cor. 11. 18,
19.
Gal 5. 20.

Now tho' these different Sects among the Jews did not separate into distinct Assemblies for Worship, but all worshipped, at the Temple, (as even the Christian Jews did, while the Temple stood, as appears from what happened to St. Paul in Jerusalem, the last time he went thither) yet they were distinguished by different Opinions, Rites, Usages, and Schools; and, which is usually the effect of such Distinctions, by different Interests and Affections. And, in allusion to those Jewish Sects, these Differences, amongst Christians, which did not break forth into open Separation, but occasioned great Sidings, and Parties, Hears and Animosities, were indifferently called *Sectisms, or Heresies*. Thus St. Paul joyns *Hatred, Variance, Wrath, Seditions, Heresie*, &c. But

But then there were another sort of Heresies, which always ended in Separation; for such Men were always either cast out of the Church, or separated themselves. Such are those which St. Peter calls *Damnable Heretics*, whom he compares with the fallen Angels, and the old World, which was destroyed with a Deluge of Water; and Sodom and Gomorrah, whom he calls *presumptuous, self-willed, and that are not afraid to speak evil of Dignities*; that is, who did wilfully and obstinately oppose the Apostles of Christ, who were invested with his Authority, answerable to the Sons of those in the Jewish Church, who set themselves up against Moses and Aaron, and reproached the Rulers of the People; and it is expressly called, *doing presumptuously, not so barker to the Priest, that standeth to minister before the Lord*. And therefore these Men are said, *to have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray*. And whosoever compares this Chapter with St. Jude's Epistle, will find, that St. Peter and St. Jude speak of the same Men, for their Characters do exactly agree; and of them St. Jude tells us, *these be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit*. And thus

^{2 Pet. 2. 1.}

^{ver. 4, 5, 6.}

^{ver. 10.}

^{Exod. 22. 18.}

^{Acts 23. 4, 5.}

^{Deut. 17. 12.}

^{2 Pet. 2. 15.}

^{Jude, v. 19.}

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thus in the first Ages of Christianity, no Men ever separated from the Communion of the Church, but such gross Hereticks, the several Sects of *Gnosticks*, of whom *Irenaeus* and *Eusebius* give us a large and particular account ; and for this reason the name *Heresy*, which properly signifies a Sect or Separation, came to be applied to corrupt and Heretical Doctrines, which in those days were the only cause of Separations.

And we may find some remains of this ancient and original use of these words in after-ages ; for though Schism commonly was used in Church-Writers, to signify Separation from Church-Communion, and Heresy to signify false Doctrine ; yet Separation from the Christian Church, though it were only occasioned upon a Dispute about Discipline, without any other error in matters of faith, was called Heresy ; Thus St. Cyprian I remember calls the Schism of *Novatianus* [Hæreticam Pravitatem] *Heretical Impiety* ; and in answer to that question of *Antonianus*, *Quam Hæresin* (*Novatianus*) introduxit, *What Heresy Novatianus was the Author of?* he alledges nothing but the breach of the Peace and Unity of the Church, and says,

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says, *That we ought not curiously to enquire, what he teaches, who is out of the Church; for whatever he be, he is no Christian who is not in the Church of Christ.*

Scias nos primo in loco, nec curiosos esse debere, quid ille doceat, cum foris doceat, quisquis ille est, & qualiscunq; est, Christianus non est, qui in Christi Ecclesia non est.
Cyp. ad Anton. Epist. 52.

And thus *Felicitissimus*, and his adherents are called *Hæretica Factio*, an Heretical Faction; though the Schism was occasioned only by a Dispute of Discipline, concerning the restoring the Lapsed to the Peace and Communion of the Church. So that in St. Cyprian's time Separation from the Church, without any other Error in the Fundamentals of Faith, was called *Heresy*.

And though Heresy did most frequently signify corrupt Doctrine, yet a mere Error in Doctrine was not thought a compleat formal Heresy, without such Willfulness and Obstinacy as ended in Separation. And therefore St. Austin describes Hereticks to be those, *who hold some false and corrupt Doctrines, and when they are reproved, in order to reduce them to truth and sobriety of Judgment, do obstinately resist, and refuse to correct their poisonous and*

Qui ergo in Ecclesia Christi morbidum aliquid pravumq; sapiunt, si correpti ut sanum rectumque sapiant, resistunt contumaciter, suaque pestifera & mortifera dogmata emendare nolunt, sed detinente persistunt; Hæretici sunt, & foras excusantes, habentur in exercemib; inimicis, &c *Aug. de Civ. Dei, lib. 18. cap. 51.*

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damnable Opinions, but persist in defending them. Thus they become Hereticks, and going out of the Church, become its Enemies, &c. And this I take to be the meaning of this Father in that famed Saying, *Errare possum, Hereticus esse nolo;* though he might err, yet he would not be an Heretick; that is, that he would not so obstinately persist in the defence of any private Opinion in opposition to the received Doctrine of the Christian Church, as to break the Communion of the Church upon that account.

Now if this were the Case, that besides those Divisions among Christians in the same Communion, which are called *Schisms* by St. Paul, there were formal Separations from the Church, of a much more heinous nature, which none in those days were guilty of, but those who renounced the purity of the Christian Doctrine; if such Separations were always condemned in the Primitive Church, as Heresy and Apostacy from Christianity, though such Separatists were not guilty of any fundamental Error in Doctrines of Faith; I see not what Dr. Owen gains; by proving that Separation is no Schism, when it appears to be a much greater evil.

See the Inquiry into the original of Evangelical Churches, chap. II. page. 231.

And

And indeed if the Doctor will allow Schism to be a great evil, when it signifies no more than Contentions and Quarrels in a Church, any one would reasonably think that Separation from a Church should be a much greater Evil: for Contentions and Quarrels are then come to their height and perfection, when they make Friends, Brethren, and Confederates part company; and it seems strange that less Quarrels should be a greater Evil than greater Quarrels, unless he thinks it is with Schism, as under the Law it was in the case of Leprosy, that when the whole Body was over-spread with it, the Leper was pronounced clean.

But the most material Inquiry here is, What is a publick Assembly for Religious Worship? for our Dissenters meet as publickly now, as the Church of England, and therefore cannot be charged with forsaking Christian Assemblies; and in times of Persecution the Primitive Christians met very privately in small numbers, or in the night, or very early in the morning, to avoid the discovery of their Persecutors, and yet such private and clandestine Meetings were not really Conventicles, but publick

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lick Church-Assemblies. Which is a plain Proof, that it is not numbers, nor meeting openly and publickly which makes a Church-Assembly, but holding such Assemblies by the publick Authority of the Church, and in union with it : As in the State, when a great many People meet together without Publick Authority, it is a Riot, not a Legal Assembly.

Publick Places of Worship, allowed by the Publick Authority of the Church, is one thing which makes the Assemblies of Christians publick : For the Primitive Christians allowed no separate Assemblies, no Congregations but what met in the publick Church ; and therefore we find an express Canon in the Council of Gangra, That if any shall take upon him out of the Church privately to preach at home, and making light of the Church, shall do those things, which belong only to the Church, without the presence of the Priest, and the leave and allowance of the Bishops, let him be Accursed.

So that Publick Worship, is that Worship which is performed in Publick Churches, or, in case of necessity, in other places, by the allowance and appointment of the Publick Authority of Church

*Dr. Cave's
Prim. Christianity, par. I.
ch. 7. p. 171.*

*Concil. Gang.
Can. 6.*

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Church and State, and Separate Meetings, which have no such allowance and authority, must be Schismatical Conventicles, unless they can prove the lawfulness and necessity of such a Separation ; for indeed nothing can make a Separation lawful, but what makes it necessary.

II. This following Treatise consists of two Parts : the first concerns those, who wholly, or for the most part absent themselves from the Publick Assemblies of Christians : and these are of three sorts : 1. Those who forsake Religious Assemblies out of Prophaneness, for want of a due sense of any Religion, or in contempt of it. 2. Those who forsake Religious Assemblies for want of a due sense of the necessity and advantage of Publick Worship ; who do not go to Church, because they think they can worship God as well at home in their Closets or Families. 3. Those who plead Conscience for their Separation, and set up distinct Communions of their own.

The second Part is designed to correct some great Miscarriages in Publick Worship, which some, who profess to

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live in Communion with the Church of *England*, are too notoriously guilty of Such as these :

1. The forsaking the Communion of their Parish Churches without just cause for it.
2. Irreverence in Worship.
3. The neglect of a due attendance on the publick Prayers of the Church.
4. The neglect of the Publick Administration of Baptism.
5. That they neglect or refuse to submit their Children and Servants to Publick Instructions.
6. That they either never receive the Lord's Supper, or very rarely.

III. The very naming these things, must needs convince all Men, who have any sense of Religion, how seasonable this Discourse is ; for there was never any Age wherein there was more need of it. And since Religion has so great an influence upon the Government of Mens Lives, the neglect or miscarriage of Publick Worship does not only tend to corrupt Mens Manners, but has a very ill aspect upon Publick Affairs.

I confess it is a very ill time for any Man, who prefers his own Ease and

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Quiet

Quiet, before the Service of God and of Religion, to put forth to Sea in such a Storm and Hurricane ; when the passions of Men are in such a ferment, that they are hardly capable of cole thoughts, and impatient of the gentlest Reproof and Opposition ; the most charitable Designs are misconstrued, and nicknamed ; and whoever endeavours to convince Men of their Mistakes, how careful soever he be to avoid all just occasion of offence, is either a Railler, or a Persecutor.

But these things, I thank God, do not much affect me, and shall never affright me from any part of my Duty. I value a good Name as much as other Men, but am contented to be reproached for the sake of my Lord and Master, who was Himself reproached and vilified by Scribes and Pharisees.

But that which, I suppose will be thought most unseasonable at this time, is what concerns the Dissenters from our present Establishment ; for this is now upon all occasions urged, and thought a sufficient Answer to all such Discourses,

But can it be thought unseasonable to perswade Men not to forsake Christian

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stian Assemblies, when it is grown so general a practice, that many have lost all sense of the evil of it? Is it not a fit season for the applications of the Physician, when the Patient is dangerously sick of a mortal distemper?

Thanks be to our good God, we still enjoy the Opportunities of Publick-Worship, and therefore have opportunity also of perswading and exhorting Men to return to the Communion of the Church: How effectual indeed such Exhortations may be at such a time we cannot tell; success in these matters does not so much depend upon the fittest season, as upon the Grace of God, and the good temper of the Ground where the Seed falls, as our Saviour tells us in the Parable of the Sower, *Mattb. 13.* However, in case of necessity, a thing must be done when and as it may; and I think there was never greater necessity for this Exhortation than in our days.

But that which I perceive makes some Men think it so unseasonable at this time, to perswade Men to return to the Communion of the Church of *Eng-*
land, is, because they are either in great hope to pull down the Church of *Eng-*
land,

land, or at least to open the Door a little wider, to let those in, who are now excluded by some scruples of Conscience, about some indifferent Rites and Ceremonies used in our Worship.

As for the first of these, I wish with all my Soul, that such seasonable Exhortations as these may prove very unseasonable for their Designs, that it may bring Men to their Wits, and make them consider what they are a doing, when they go about to pull down the best Church in the World. It may be very unseasonable indeed for them, but it would be a very unseasonable and despicable piece of Folly and Modesty for all those that favour *Sion*, to stand still and say nothing, while they accomplish their Designs, and bring their wicked Devices to pass.

As for the second sort, who only desire to see the Church Doors a little wider, to receive more honest and devout Men into our Communion, I cannot imagine why they should conceive such Exhortations unseasonable at this time: for, are they affraid that such Discourses should so far satisfy all Men in our Communion, that there should be no need of any alteration? Truly

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I have no great hopes to see such blessed Effects of the wisest and most convincing Discourses; and if such a thing ever should be, certainly no good Men would be troubled at it, since the great End they designed, *viz.* To see all Men return to the Communion of the Church, would be as effectually obtained; and it is much more desirable to see Men rectify their own Mistakes, than to alter wholsom Constitutions, wherein there is always great danger, and very seldom any great success, witness the miserable Confusions of the last Age.

Or do they think it impossible to vindicate the Church of *England* from unjust Imputations, to wipe off that Dirt, which is cast upon her by her inveterate Enemies, to discover the evil and danger of Schism and Separation, without obstinately adhering to every *Punctilio*, and opposing all reasonable Condescensions to the weakness or ignorance of others? I am sure there is no Consequence in this, and it is a great Argument that they censure and revile Men before they know them.

We know how to distinguish betwixen the lawfulness and necessity of things,

things, between some less material Circumstances of Worship, and the Peace and Communion of the Christian Church. Possibly the most zealous and most learned Defenders of the Church, are most ready to any Reasonable Compliances, when-ever Authority shall see fit. We have a late Instance of it in an excellent Person, than whom possibly no Man ever writ better for the Church, nor ever hinted more reasonable and equal Proposals in the behalf of Dissenters.

*Dr. Stillingf.
Unreasonable-
ness of Sepa-
ration.*

The truth is, it is as absolutely necessary to dispose Mens minds to Peace and Union by good Arguments, and pious and earnest Exhortations, as it is for Publick Authority to relax the Terms of Communion, to give ease to some doubting and scrupulous Consciences; for while Men have such superstitious Conceits, that God is either pleased or displeased with doing or not doing some indifferent things in themselves considered; with wearing or not wearing a Surplice, or using or not using the Cross in Baptism: when Men think that God will be angry with them for doing that, which he hath no where forbid; and that we must do nothing

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in the external Ministeries of Religion, but what he has expressly commanded, (and then I confess I do not see how we can perform any one Duty of external Worship with a safe Conscience, how we can pray either with or without a Form, since neither of them is commanded in Scripture, as the external Circumstances of no one Duty are that I know of) I say, while Men have such wilde unpracticable Notions in their Heads, which when they are pursued to their last Issue, overthrow all manner of external Order and Government in the Church, and end in all the Confusions of *Quakerism*, it is a vain thing to talk of Comprehensions and Concessions.

And while Men have no sense at all of the evil of Schism and Separation, but think it as innocent a thing to set up Church against Church, as to go from one Parish-Church to another ; it is evident that they will never desire to return to the Union of the Church, who have no sense what a necessary duty Christian Communion is, and what a damning sin Schism is : and therefore whoever does sincerely and cordially desire to see all sober Christians united in

in the same Communion, must earnestly exhort, perswade, and convince, as well as yield and comply.

The common Danger we are all in from the growing Power, and secret Conspiracies of the Popish Faction, makes all Men acknowledge the necessity, and call aloud for Union. Our Dissenters, who never did, nor are ever likely to unite in any thing, but their *Cries against Popery, and their Designs of pulling down the Church of England,* think this a convenient Opportunity to accomplish their Ends, and have been very busie to libel Church and Church-Men, to say nothing now of the State : this hath put many worthy Sons of the Church (who are impatient to hear their Mother reviled and slandered) upon the defensive part, to vindicate the Reformation of our Church from their rude Calumnies, and yet to express their readiness to comply and unite upon such Terms, when ever publick Authority shall see fit, as would not utterly destroy our Constitution. The first they have done beyond the possibility of a sober Reply ; and how fruitless their Charity is in attempting the second, the Dissenters them-

themselves will convince all Men, who cannot patiently hear of any other terms of Concord, but the extirpation of the Corrupt and Antichristian Church of *England*. I am not ambitious to thrust my self into this Scuffle, and therefore do not appear as a Disputant, but make a close and serious Application to the Consciences of Men, which I hope, when the heat of Disputation is a little over, may prove a more powerful conviction to all well-meaning Men, than the best and most unanswerable Reasons have hitherto done.

PART

PART. I.

Concerning those who
wholly forsake Religi-
ous Assemblies.

C H A P. I.

Containing an Address and Exhorta-
tion to those, who have no sense at
all of Religion, or that Obligation
which lies on them to worship God,
and take care of their Souls.

S E C T. I.

Some Proposals made to the Speculative
Atheist. I. That they would once
more consider, what strong and almost
invincible Inclinations, there are in
Human Nature to the Worship of
God.

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God. 2. That they would not publicly affront Religion. 3. That they would not wholly forsake Religious Assemblies. 4. That they would not intermeddle in the Disputes and Controversies of Religion.

First, I shall begin with those who withdraw themselves from Christian Assemblies out of profaneness, for want of any due sense of Religion, or that Obligation which lies on them to worship God, and to take care of their own Souls; And there are two sorts of these Men, first the Speculative; secondly, the Practical Atheist.

First, The Speculative Atheist, who denies the being of God, and therefore must of necessity despise his Worship; for that which is not, cannot be the object of our Love or Fear, or Religious Adorations. Those indeed who do not believe that there is a God, may in prudence conceal their Atheism, and comply with the custom of their Country, in performing all the External Acts of Worship; but yet few Atheists have so much Wit, or good breeding, as not to affront the universal

universal Belief and Practice of Mankind.

Now I shall not at present dispute the Case with these Men, nor attempt to convince them of their great Folly and Madness in not worshipping God, by proving that there is a God who ought to be worshipped. This requires a larger Discourse than my present Design will allow, and has been already done more than once, with all the advantages of Reason and Learning, by much better Pens ; and therefore I shall only make three or four very fair and reasonable Proposals to them.

First. That they would once more seriously consider, what strong and almost invincible Inclinations there are in Humane Nature to the Worship of God. I do not argue now from Natural Notions and Anticipations, or those common Maxims and Principles of Reason, which are found in all Mankind, because the Atheist tells us, That these are only the Principles of our Education, and we should never have had such Conceits and Fancies in our Heads, if we had not been taught them ; though it is an hard thing to give an account, how these Principles should

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should first come to be entertained in the World; who taught them the first **Man**; and how he came so readily to believe them, and so carefully to propagate them to Posterity; and it seems strange, how Mankind should so universally assent to such Principles, as the Being of God, and a Providence, &c. or, if at least they are not extremely agreeable to the Make and Frame of our Minds, though we should suppose them not to be Natural **Notions**.

But, I say, to let pass this now, I shall only desire these Men to consult a little with the Inclinations of Nature; which are not the Effects of Reason and Discourse, but Natural Impressions, the necessary Efforts, *Impetus*, and Tendencies of Nature, as a Stone naturally falls downwards, and the Fire as naturally ascends. Now it is impossible that any Education should put new Inclinations or new Passions into our Minds; Education may direct our Natural Inclinations and Passions to Unnatural Objects; but it can no more make new Inclinations and Passions, than it can make a new Soul. Now among all the Inclinations of Humane Nature,

Nature, there is none more strong and invincible than the Inclination to Religion, to worship something or other as a God. Though the Heathens were greatly mistaken in their Notion of a God, and some worshipped the Sun, Moon, and Stars, the Earth and Seas, and Rivers, and the meanest and most contemptible Creatures, for Gods; yet they all agreed in this universal Inclination to Religious Worship; which is a plain Argument, that this Universal Consent in Religion was more owing to the impulses and tendencies of a Reasonable Nature, than to the clear and distinct Principles of Natural Reason; for Reason always joyns the Act and the Object together; but Natural Inclinations are a blind and confused Principle of Action, which thrusts forward to such an Act, without a clear perception of its Object, just as the Appetite of Hunger, which does not direct to any particular sort of Food, but only to eating: for these Natural Inclinations are of the same use with our Natural Passions, which are not designed to direct us what to do, (that is the Work of Reason and wise Consideration) but to excite us

more

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more vigorously to action, by a natural kind of Thirst and Appetite; and therefore as Men act very foolishly, who suffer themselves to be hurried away by their Passions, without expecting the Directions and Government of Reason; so do those Men, who follow their Natural Inclinations, without directing them to their proper Object.

And this gives a plain Account, how the Inclination to Religious Worship may be natural, and yet the universal Practice of the Heathen World for so many Ages, in worshipping those things for God, which are no Gods, and in worshipping a great many false Gods instead of one True God, be no Argument, that what we call Idolatry and Polytheism is the Voice of Nature.

It is sufficiently known, that when we prove against the Atheist, that there is a God; and that he ought to be worshipped, from the general consent of Mankind in worshipping some God or other, which is no less than the Voice of Nature; they presently reply, that this Argument will prove Idolatry and Polytheism also to be natural, since Man-

to the Worship of God.

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Mankind were not more universally agreed in worshiping a God, than they were in worshiping many false Gods.

Now though this be false; for the World was never without some Worshippers of the one True God, the Maker and Governor of the World, and in the most prevailing Times of Paganism, the whole Nation of the Jews, a great, potent and flourishing People, were the Worshippers of the Lord Jehovah; and though we should suppose it to be otherwise, there are several very good Answers returned to this Objection by Learned Men; yet I confess none seems to me more clear than this I have now hinted; the difference between Natural Inclinations and Natural Reason. Natural Inclinations work more necessarily, and to this we owe the universal Consent in Religious Worship; but in a State of Nature, Man-kind were to receive their Directions concerning the Object and Nature of Religious Worship from Natural Reason, which will discover the True God to them, if they make a wise use of it; but they may chuse whether they will or no, and if they do not exercise their Reason

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son to find out the True God, (as it is plain the Heathens did not, for which St. Paul tells us they are inexcusable Rom. 1.) no wonder if they fall into Idolatry and Polytheism, and the most ridiculous Superstitions. Which shew how the Consent of Mankind, which is owing to Natural Inclinations, prove the Worship of God to be the Voice of Nature, when the Consent of the Heathen World, in the Worship of a great many false Gods, can prove no more, but that they neglected the Directions of Natural Reason, or were imposed on by Wicked Spirits : And this makes it very evident, that when Men so vastly differ in the Object of their Worship, but so universally agree in paying Divine Honours to some Being or other, this cannot be the Effect of meer Custom, or Education, or Natural Reason, (for then they would agree as well in the Object and Nature, as in the Act of Worship) but of a natural Inclination to Religion, not governed and conducted by right Reason.

And I shall observe further, that Natural Inclinations and Passions being only (according to the Original Design)

sign and Contrivance of our Wise Maker,) subservient to right Reason, and to be governed by it, natural Inclinations being a necessary Spring of Motion and Action, when meer dry Reason in this imperfect State, would not give us sufficient quickness and vigor in pursuing its Commands. Hence, I say, these Natural Inclinations to Religion, which are so visible in all Mankind, do plainly prove, that there are Natural Notions of God, and of Religion, imprinted upon Mens Minds; for there would be no need of such Natural Inclinations, were there no Natural Knowldg to direct and govern them, no more than there would be of our Natural Passions, of Hope, and Fear, and Desire, and Love, were there no Natural Objects proportioned to such Passions: And therefore such Natural Inclinations plainly prove, that those Notions Mankind always had of the Being of God, are not the Effects of meer Education, but of Nature: for if one be Natural, both must be so; Natural Inclinations, which are in themselves no better than a blind *Impetus*, must have some Natural Knowldg to guide them.

For what the Atheist says, That we owe the Knowledg and Belief of a God, only to the Instruction of our Parents and Tutors when we are Children; and that this Belief taking so early a possession of our Minds, grows up into such strong Prejudices, that we mistake it for the Dictate of Nature; and that our Inclinations to Religion are wholly owing to this Belief, is as ridiculous as to say, That our Natural Passions of Hope, and Fear, and Desire, are not implanted in our Natures, but are only owing to the Impressions of External Objects. And then we may as well say, that as long as there is Light, and External Objects to be seen, a Man will see without Eyes, and by the same Reason, may hear without Ears; for what our Senses are in the Body, *that* Inclinations and Passions are in the Mind, necessary to make us capable of External Impressions, and to give us a quick perception of them; no Belief or Opinion whatsoever can put any new Inclination into our Minds, to that which we have no natural inclination to. It is possible to excite some Inclinations which lay dormant in us, and which

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we had no sense of before ; but to put new Inclinations into us, is to create new Powers and Faculties in our Souls.

And therefore since this Inclination to Religion is so strong and so universal, it is evident, that it cannot result from any Notions and Opinions imprinted on our Minds from without, nor does at all depend on them : for some Men can baffle their Reasons, and think they are able to confute all the Arguments for the Being of a God, when they cannot silence and conquer their Inclinations to believe that there is a God, and that they ought to worship him ; this the Atheist feels, and endeavours to laugh away as a mere childish Superstition ; whereas were this Inclination owing to Opinion and Prejudice, it is impossible it should be more strong and more lasting, than such a Belief is.

The sum of all is this, That if our Modern Atheists, who pretend such an intimate knowldg and familiar acquaintance with Nature, would be perswaded seriously to consider the Powers of Nature, and be better acquainted with the Frame and

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Constitution of their own Natures; if they would consider what is the natural Language and Interpretation of those strong Impressions of Religion, which they feel in their own Minds, it might, by the Blessing of God, open their Eyes to see and adore that God, who made them, and cure their Soul of that most fatal and mortal Disease, which makes them Beasts here, and Devils hereafter.

Secondly, Another Proposal I would make to these Men is, That they would not publickly affront Religion, that they would not so impudently attempt to laugh God and Religion out of the World; that they would not make sport with those Things which other Men account Sacred; that they would not profane the Holy Scriptures, by turning them into Ridicule, or obscene and impious Burlesque. This possibly will be thought a very odd Proposal to these Men, who think it the only way to justify their Atheism, by making Religion look ridiculous; but yet had I to deal with reasonable Men, though they were Atheists, I would not despair of convincing them of the reasonableness of this Proposal.

For first, this is nothing but what the Laws of Civility and good Manners require from them. No well-bred Man will choose to put a publick Affront upon his Friends and Neighbours, though he sees them daily guilty of great Follies and Indiscretions. The Laws of Conversation require us to treat all Men with just respects, though their Understandings be of different makes and sizes, and their Fortune and way of Life very different from our own ; much less then can a modest Man endure the thoughts of affronting Mankind, or laughing at any thing which is received or established by an Universal Consent. Though the Belief of God were as very a Dream and Fancy as the Tales of Fairies, yet there is a certain Reverence due to Humane Nature, at least from Men ; and since all Mankind, in all Ages of the World (excepting some few wise and cautious Atheists) have believed that there is a God, and have honoured him with publick Worship, it is an Affront to Humane Nature to laugh at the Being of God, though we do not believe it.

Nay this is not only an Affront to

Scoffing at Religion

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Humane Nature, but to Publick Government : In all Nations one Religion or other is established by a Law, so that these Men do not only laugh at the Dreams & Dotages of single Men, but at the united Counsels, and most mature Resolves of all the World ; which is an Argument of great Boldness, but of very little Wit or Manners. A modest Man would be apt to suspect his own judgment of Things, when he found himself opposed by the general Consent of all Men, and by the Laws and Constitutions of all Nations, which are the mature and deliberate Results of the publick Wisdom ; but if this did not make him of the Common Opinion, yet at least he would not rudely contradict it.

But not only the Wisdom, but the Authority of Government is affronted by these Men, when they laugh at such publick Constitutions, at Religion considered as established by Law. So much do such Men recede from the Principles of their great Master, who though he had no great opinion of Religion in it self, yet thought it something considerable, when it became the Law of the Nation. But neither the Wisdom nor Authority of Laws

Mr. Hobbs.

Laws can command respect from some Men, without a vigorous execution of them, and that would soon teach them better Manners, than ever they will learn in the School of Atheism.

Nay, to laugh at the Being of God, and at Religion, is not only to affront the general sense of Man-kind, and the Wisdom, and Authority of all Governments, but the Wisdom of the sagest Philosophers, and the most inquisitive Men of all Ages. Among all the Ancient Philosophers, no Man expressly denied the Being of God, or that Worship which was due to him; *Epicurus* indeed denied his Providence, which was only a more civil way of turning him out of the World, though he pretended to worship him upon account of his infinite, but idle and unactive Perfections. *Socrates* died a Martyr for Religion, and *Plato* and *Aristotle* did both acknowledg a supreme Being; and the later Philosophers, though they differed about the Nature of God, yet did not question but there was one: so that the Being of a God is not the mistake merely of a few ignorant unphilosophical Heads, but has in all Ages had such Learned Patrons,

The Contempt of Religion

Patrons, as at least do not deserve to be laughed at by Men of the least modesty and good breeding.

Secondly, I would desire these Men to consider, how little they consult their own Reputation in laughing at Religion ; it is a very silly thing for some few Men, (though they were in the right) to think to out-laugh all the World ; the loudest laughter will always be on that side, right or wrong, where there are the greatest numbers ; though indeed all Men have such a veneration for God and Religion, that such Abuses and Affronts of Religion do not so much provoke Men to laughter, as to a holy jealousy and indignation. No Man can endure with patience to hear that exposed to contempt, which he admires and adores. Such Atheistical Scoffers are looked on as the common Enemies of Mankind ; all Men, but such like themselves, abhor and scorn them, fly their Company, hate their very Names, as Traitors to the Majesty of Heaven, the great Pests of Humane Conversation, and the Reproach and Shame of Humane Nature. And can any wise Man, (let his Opinions be what they will) who designs

designs to live happily in this World, (as me-thinks those above all others should desire, who expect nothing hereafter) think this the best way to Happiness, to forfeit the Love and Friendship of all Men who love and worship God, or make any shew of Religion? which are so much the greatest numbers, that he does in a manner banish himself from Humane Conversation, or render it very unpleasant and uneasy.

I know there are some, who expect to gain the Reputation of great Wits, and very cunning Men, by unsettling Foundations, and breaking a merry Jest upon Religion; but they should consider, that the generality of Men, who will be Judges of these Matters, whether they will or no, look upon the Being of God as so plain and evident a Truth, that that Man infallibly forfeits the reputation of his Understanding, who sets up for Atheism. Atheists may make a Scene and Theatre for themselves, and admire and applaud one another, but all the rest of the World despise them: for indeed it is no argument of any great depth and subtlety, to raise Objections, and start

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start Difficulties, which a Man of very mean parts may do; but it is a greater tryal of Judgment to answer them, which the Atheist, it seems, cannot do: when Men are so over-subtil, that they cannot understand these plain and obvious Demonstrations, which convince all Man-kind, and are understood by every Plow-man, such subtily is never admired, but despised.

And as for Wit, it is so very undecent to jest with grave and serious Matters, that though it have never so much Salt, it is nauseous and offensive to sober Minds; no Man admires his Wit, who abuses his Prince, his Father, or his Friend: Prophane Wit is the easiest of all, as consisting in such bold Allusions as any Man may make, who has neither Modesty nor Grace; and those Men, who have no way to shew their Wit, but by abusing their Master, have nothing to boast of, but the very scum and putrefaction of Wit.

Thirdly, These Men should consider what mischief they may do to publick Societies, by laughing at Religion, and exposing it to contempt; for Religion is the firmest Bond of Humane Societies,

Societies ; and if once Men shoud cast off the Fear of God, nothing but external Fear and Power could restrain and govern them. Atheism is a Secret, which he, who has it, ought in prudence and interest to keep to himself ; for an Atheist can never mend his condition, but may greatly injure himself by propagating Atheism. All the Ends he can serve by Atheism, he enjoys in greatest perfection, while no Man understands the Secret but himself : for the only end he can propose in it, is to be delivered from the Fears of Invincible Powers, to have no restraints laid upon his sensual Enjoyments, but what Caution and Interest suggest, that he may satisfy his Lust by any means, so long as he can secure himself from present danger. Now when he is an Atheist alone, he has great advantage of the rest of Mankind, because they are restrained by a sense of Religion, and the Fear of God, which is as unequal a Match, as to fight with a Man, whose hands are tied, when your own are free. But now if he should, by his Wit and Learning, proselitise a whole Nation to Atheism, Hell would break loose upon Earth, and he might soon find

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find himself exposed to all those Violences and Injuries which he now securely practises. When there is nothing to restrain Men from doing any Wick-edness they have a mind to, but only the Fear of Humane Power, this World will quickly prove a very miserable State, and Scene of Confusion and Disorder, of Rapes and Adulteries, of Violence and Rapine, of Blood and Murders, especially if the great Leviathan, who is entrusted with the Sovereign Power, understands his own Liberty, as well as his Atheistical Subjects do theirs : So that no wise Man can think it his Interest to promote Atheism, and therefore it cannot be his Interest to deride Religion, and expose it to contempt.

Fourthly, Another Reason why they should at least be modest Atheists, is for fear that they should find a God when they come into the other World; for they are not so absolutely certain that there is no God, as to be perfectly secure that there is none; though they think they can answer all the Arguments, whereby Men prove there is a God, (which is the utmost they pretend to); though they know how to make

make a World without God, and can laugh at the silly Cheats which have been put upon Man-kind by some cunning States-men, who invented the Belief of a God, and the Fears of Religion, to make their Government more easy and secure; yet after all, they dare not undertake to demonstrate that there is no God, and that it is impossible there should be one; and till they can do this, they can never be perfectly secure that there is none.

And therefore lest they should find that there is a God, when they come into the other World, they should offer as few Affronts to him as may be here; to deny his Being, when he has furnished us with so many ways of knowing him, is a sufficient Affront, without any other additional Aggravations: but if it were nothing but meer incurable Ignorance, which made Men Atheists, the Fault is much less, than when they express so much scorn and contempt of the very Name of God and Religion; for this looks like a profest enmity to the Deity, that they are not only ignorant of him for want of sufficient Evidence, but that they hate

Religion not to be scorned

hate and despise the least Thoughts and Imagination of such a Being as Men call God. And therefore were it possible to separate the disbelief of a God from a hatred and contempt of him (as certainly it might be, were Men Atheists merely for want of Evidence) it would concern such Men, tho' they enjoyed the other Liberties, which Atheism allows, yet to be very modest and civil even to the fanciful Idea and Imagination of a God.

For, fifthly, whether Religion be true or false, it is no ridiculous thing, and therefore it argues great folly for any Man to laughe at it. If there be no God, all Religion indeed is a Mistake; but it is no ridiculous Mistake, when there is such Evidence for it, as convinces the generality of Mankind, even the wisest and most inquisitive Men: and what we call Religion, is so grave and serious a Thing, and of such high importance and concernment to us, that if it be not true, all Mankind have reason to wish it were true.

What more lovely and desireable Being could there possibly be, than is repre-

represented by the Notion of a God : an infinitely Wise and Powerful, Holy and Just Being, who made and who takes care of all his Creatures, who governs the World with the kindness and tenderness of a Parent, and takes care, not only of the Great and Publick Affairs of Kingdoms and Empires, but of every particular Creature, how mean and contemptible soever it appears ; and if there be no God, what Man, who loves himself, could forbear wishing that there were One on whom he might securely trust and depend in all Events ?

And what is more worthy of a Reasonable Creature, than to adore and worship so perfect and glorious a Being, to pay our thankful Acknowledgments to our Great Maker, and constant Benefactor, which is one great part of Religion, which is nothing else, but to love, reverence, and obey, the most Lovely, Excellent, Powerful, Wise, and Holy Lord and Judge of the World ?

And what can be more noble than the end of Religion, which is not merely to live happily a few Years in this World, but to be happy for ever ?

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a Thing so agreeable to those vehement Desires of Immortality, which are imprinted on our Natures, and does so raise our Minds above the mean and beggarly Enjoyments of Sense, that it makes a truly religious Man almost as much differ from earthly Men, and foppish Atheists, as a Man differs from a Beast.

Here certainly is nothing that is contemptible, nothing but what deserves to be admired; and though the Atheist may think, that we are mistaken in all this, yet he cannot say, that we have made a foolish choice. This may suffice for the second Proposal, to perswade them not to put publick Affronts upon God and Religion.

Thirdly; If what I have already said, could perswade these Men to treat the Name of God and Religion, with some external Modesty and Respect, my next Proposal to them should be, Not to forsake the Publick Assemblies for Religious Worship; and indeed they cannot do this, unless they will set up for Atheism, and openly profess it; or at least bring themselves under a great suspicion of it.

Now

to forsake Religious Assemblies.

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Now I cannot imagine what they have reasonably to object against this; to be sure they can have no Scruple of Conscience; for those who believe there is no God, cannot believe themselves accountable to any but themselves in these Matters, while they conceal their own Sentiments and Opinions of Things; and though this be not the Worship of God, whose Being they deny, yet it is a piece of Civility and Respect to Men, to common and received Opinions, and to publick Laws and Constitutions.

And the Advantages of this may be very great; for who knows how God may work upon their Minds at such a Time! how they may be affected with observing the great and publick Expressions of Devotion in Christian Assemblies, and begin to think, that this must be something more than a Dream and Fancy! Who knows how God may direct the Preacher, and put such words into his Mouth, as may pierce their Souls, and dispel those Mists and Fogs which clouded their Understandings, and enable them to discover the Truth, and Certainty, and Excellency of Religion! To be sure this is never likely

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to be done by their turning their Backs upon Publick Instructions, which is very often the Cause, but is a very unlikely Cure of Atheism.

But, lastly, I think at least such Men should be so modest, as not to intermeddle in the Disputes and Controversies of Religion. It is a fulsome and nauseous Thing, to see the Atheists and Infidels of our Days, to turn great Reformers of Religion, to set up a mighty Cry for Liberty of Conscience: for what-ever Reformation of Religion may be needful at this Time, what-ever Liberty of Conscience may be fit to be granted, yet what have these Men to do to meddle with it? those who think Religion a meer Fable, and God to be an Utopian Prince, and Conscience a Man of Clouts, set up for a Scare-crow to fright such silly Creatures from their Beloved Enjoyments; and Hell and Heaven to be forged in the same Mint with the Poets *Styx*, and *Acheron*, and *Elysian* Fields? We are like to see Blessed Times, if such Men as these had but the Reforming of Religion.

ESCT.

S E C T. II.

*Concerning the Practical Atheists,
who profess to believe that there is
a God, but live as if there were
none ; very seldom think of him,
and neglect to worship him : Seve-
ral Considerations to convince them
of the Evil and Sinfulness of Irre-
ligion.*

Secondly ; Another sort of Men, who desert Religious Assemblies for want of a due sense of Religion, are the Practical Atheists, Men who though they profess to believe that there is a God, yet live as if there were none, very seldom think of him, and take no care to please him, and make him their Friend ; and though they believe their Souls shall survive their Bodies, and be either very happy, or very miserable hereafter, yet are so wretchedly careless, so brutishly unconcerned for Times to come, as to make no Provision for a future State ; to use no diligence to escape the Eter-

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And I have but two ways of dealing with these Men, to Convince, and to Perswade ; to convince them of the Evil, the Danger, the Folly of Irreligion, of forsaking the Publick Assemblies of Christians ; and to perswade them to take care of their Souls, and to prepare for an Eternal State.

Now the natural Method of proceeding is, first to Convince, and then to Perswade : And therefore for the conviction of these Men, I shall represent to them, the Evil, Danger, and Folly of this.

First ; The Evil and Sinfulness of it. Now supposing that there is a God, as these Men profess to believe, every Man must acknowledg it to be a most heinous and provoking Sin to neglect or contemn his Worship.

2d. For Irreligion is as great, if not a greater affront to God, and contempt of him, than Atheism it self. An Atheist denies that there is a God ; an Irreligious Man contemns and slighteth God, whose Being he owns ; the one denies the Being of God, the other

reproaches his Nature. The Atheist denies that there is such a Being, whom we call God ; the Irreligious Man owns that there is such a Being, but will not own him for a God ; that is, will not worship him as God ; for Religious Worship is nothing else but a publick acknowledgment of God, of the Excellencies and Perfections of his Nature, of his Power and Providence in making and governing the World, and taking Care of all his Creatures ; and to refuse to worship God, or to live in an habitual neglect of it, makes a meer Titular and Mock-God of him, and argues a very mean and contemptuous Opinion of the Deity, as including a denial of the Essential Perfections of his Nature, or of his Providence and Government.

The Pagan Superstitions and Idolatries, were a great reproach to God, both as they gave that Worship, which is due only to God, to Creatures, and too often to Evil Spirits ; and as they worshipped God by such ridiculous, or barbarous and inhumane Rites and Ceremonies, as made a dishonourable representation of the Divine Nature ; but yet even their Idolatrous Worship

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Secondly ; To deny or neglect the Worship of God, is the highest Injustice ; it is to deny God what is his natural Right, what is due from us, and what alone we are able to give, and what he requires of us.

If we consider God as the most Excellent and perfect Being, who has all possible Perfections in himself, and from himself, and so he has a right to the most Excellent Worship : for all Perfections by a natural right, challenge a proportionable esteem and reverence, and the most absolute and sovereign Perfections, a Sovereign Worship. We cannot see nor hear of an excellent Man, but it excites in us a great Esteem, Love, or Reverence, according to the nature of the Thing wherein he excels ; and prompts us to say what we know in his Commendations. And it is accounted injustice among Men, to deny each other their just Praises ; And how much greater Injustice is it, to deny God his Essential Glory, that in-

incommunicable Worship, which naturally belongs to such incommunicable Perfections? Indeed it is almost impossible not to admire that which is Great, nor to love that which is Good, nor to fear and reverence that which is powerful; for our Passions are naturally determined to their proper Objects, and not to discover those Perfections which are notorious and visible, is a reproach to our Understandings; and not to love, or fear, and admire them according to their Natures, is accounted dulness and stupidity, and a vicious defect in our Will and Passions; which is a plain Argument, that all Perfections have a natural right to some proportionable Respects; and therefore the Infinite Perfections of God naturally challenge the highest Veneration, since there is such a natural Relation between natural Perfections, and the natural Passions of our Minds.

If we consider God as the first Cause of all Things, so God has a natural right to the Praise and Glory of all his Works; and therefore all the Works of God are said to praise him: *The Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his handy-work.*

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work. What-ever Wisdom, Power, or Goodness is seen in the frame of this vast and beautiful World, what-ever Perfections are bestowed on any Creatures, must be ascribed to the great Maker of all Things. It is impossible to see any curious piece of Painting, without admiring and praising the skill of the Painter ; and that Man is very unjust, as well as very sensless, who can look upon this World, so wonderful for its unknown Extent, exquisite Contrivance, Beauty, Uniformity, infinite Numbers, variety, and perfections of its Inhabitants, and not adore and worship that God who made all this. The Order, Beauty, and Glory of Material Beings, are visible Demonstrations of the Infinite Perfections of their Invisible Cause ; and the most proper and natural Work of reasonable Creatures, is to discover the Perfections of God, and of his Works, and to worship him with the humblest and devoutest Adorations ; and if it be unjust to defraud Men of the Glory of their wise, and great, and good Actions, it is much greater injustice to God, who is the sole and independent Cause of all Things ; and yet not to worship God,

God, is to defraud him of his Glory. And if we consider more particularly, that we our selves are God's Creatures, who owe our Being to him, that *in him we live, move, and have our being*; this makes it a natural Debt, to praise and adore the God who made us; as the Psalmist speaks, *To worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker.* Know ye, that the Lord he is Psal. 95.6. God; it is he that hath made us, and not we our selves; we are his People, and the Sheep of his Pasture: Enter into his Gates with thanksgiving, and into his Courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and bless his Name. For since God made us, he has a natural Right and Interest in us, and may challenge our Homage and Obedience, as a just Debt entailed upon our Natures. Thus God argues, *A Son honoureth his Father, and a Servant his Master: If then I be a Father, where is my Honour? and if I be a Master, where is my Fear?* That is, there is at least as much natural Justice in paying all Homage and Worship to God our Heavenly Father and Sovereign Lord, as it is accounted among Men, for Children to honour their Parents, and Servants their Masters;

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So that upon all Accounts, God has a natural Right to our Homage and Worship, and nothing can excuse us from paying this Debt, unless it appear that we are under some natural Incapacity to do it : But indeed this is a Debt which we are all able to pay ; for God has made us reasonable Creatures, endowed us with Wisdom and Knowledg, to discover the Perfections of his Nature, and Works, and to understand our Obligations to him ; and with such a Principle of Will and Choice, as can act freely, and with such inward passions of Love and Joy, Fear and Reverence, Hope and Affiance, as may easily be wrought up

up to the highest strain of Devotion. He has given us Eyes to contemplate this beautiful Frame of Things, and Tongues to speak his Praises, and publish all his mighty Works ; so that Man-kind seems to be made on purpose for the Worship of God, to be a curious and diligent Observer of God's Works, and to speak of his Glory ; which lays a new Obligation on us, and gives God a natural Title to our Worship. This was the Reason why he made us, this was the Design of our Natures, and the End of our Creation.

We live now in such a busy World, where we find so many things to do, to provide Food and Raiment, and all things necessary to this Mortal State ; or, it may be, to serve the Ends of Ambition and Lust, that we can find very little time to worship God ; and therefore are apt to think that this is the least thing we have to do : But we should consider, that this is not the Original Work and Employment of Man-kind, but the punishment of our Sin, and Apostacy from God : For let us suppose, that Man-kind had preserved their Innocence, and continued in

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Paradise, where they had no need of Cloaths, and fed on the Fruit of the Garden, which grew of it self, without plowing or sowing, and was fit for Food, without any Arts of Cookery ; when there was no other bodily Employment, but to look to the Garden, which neither required much labour, nor took up much time, but was like those innocent Diversions, we now use to recreate and unbend our Minds : now, I say, in such a state as this, which was the Original State of Mankind, how could Men spend their time, but in the Contemplation of God's Works, and in the study of Divine Wisdom and Philosophy, and in adoring the great Maker of all Things ? unless we can imagine, that God gave Man such an active and busy Mind to dissolve in sloth, which is so uneasy a state, that Paradise it self could be no happiness upon these terms ; or that God designed him for an Atheistical Philosopher to admire the Works of Nature, without adoring the Wise Creator. Indeed it is not conceivable, that so vast and comprehensive a Mind , such active and boundless Passions, as God hath endowed Man-kind withal, should be

be wholly designed for no higher Employment, than to qualify a Man to be a Plow-man or a Mechanick, or to speak the greatest thing at once, to be a Prince or a Minister of State; such a Mind as comes so near Infinity, as that of Man, was certainly designed for nothing less, than the Knowledg, Love, and Admiration of an Infinite Being.

And if we must learn the End for which Creatures are made, by the End which they are capable to serve, it is evident Man was made for the Worship of God, because he is fitted with such Endowments and Perfections of Mind, as qualify him to be a Worshipper. And if God be the greatest and most perfect Being, then the Knowledg and Worship of God, is the noblest Employment of Humane Nature, and consequently the last and highest End for which Man was made.

Nay, we may consider further, that Man is not only capable of worshipping God, but no other Creature in this visible World is; he, and he only, is capable of this Work; whence again we may conclude, that God made Man for

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for his peculiar Service and Glory, unless we can imagine, that God would make a World, and place no Creature in it, whose proper Business it should be to know and worship his Wise Maker, and Bountiful Lord. Man is the Priest of Nature, who offers up the Praises and Thanksgivings of the whole Creation to God.

Thus you see that Religious Worship is a natural Debt which we owe to God; and that God does expect and exact the Payment of it from us; We may certainly conclude from hence, that he expects we should live according to the most perfect Constitution of our Natures. This is the natural Rule of our Actions, to serve the Ends for which we were made; for God did not make such and such Natures for nothing, either to be unemployed, or employed to other, or to less and meaner purposes than they were designed for.

And besides this, we have frequent and express Commands to worship God, in that Revelation he hath made to us of his Will. The Scripture is so full of Precepts, Exhortations, and Reproofs about this Matter, that

I need not spend time to prove so acknowledged a Truth. But from the whole of what I have now discoursed, we may safely conclude the great Evil of Irreligion, as being the highest injustice to our Maker and Sovereign Lord.

Thirdly ; The great Evil of Irreligion, of denying or neglecting the Worship of God, appears in this, That it is the most sordid Ingratitude. Now Ingratitude is Injustice too ; but it is Injustice to a Benefactor ; that is, it consists in violating all those Obligations which Goodness and Kindness has laid upon us ; as Injustice, properly so called, consists in breaking the Rules of Natural or Civil Right. For Mankind generally accounts the Obligation to return a Kindness, as strong and necessary as to pay a Debt ; and nothing is more infamous among Men, than an ungrateful Person ; for as Goodness is a greater Perfection than strict Justice ; so Ingratitude must needs be a more hateful Vice than bare Injustice, because it is opposite to the greatest Good. As Goodness is the greatest Glory and Perfection of Humane Nature,

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so Ingratitude must needs be the greatest Infamy and Reproach, because it is at the greatest distance from Goodness. Now among Men, Injustice and Ingratitude may be separated : Men may be unjust, but not ungrateful, and they may be ungrateful, and not unjust, according to the strict Notion of Injustice : for Men may wrong and injure those who never did them any kindness, and that is Injustice without Ingratitude ; and they may neglect to make decent Acknowledgments, and Returns of Kindness, without injuring their Friends, in any of their Natural or Civil Rights, and that is Ingratitude without Injustice : But now it is impossible to be unjust to God, without being ungrateful too, because he is not only our Natural Lord, but our great Benefactor ; and those very things which give him a natural Right to our Worship and Obedience, do not only lay on us the Obligations of Justice, but of Gratitude to worship him. He made us, and this gives him a natural Right to our Worship, because he is our Natural Lord ; we are entirely his and owe our selves, and all we have, and all we can do, to him ; and this makes

makes it very unjust to deny or neglect his Worship : But then we must consider, that if we love our Selves and our Being, and those Advantages of Happiness, which Being makes us capable of, then much more we are obliged in Gratitude to praise and adore that God who gave us our Being ; for tho possibly some will not allow it proper to say, that God was good to us before we had a Being, yet he was very good in making us ; and therefore it is high Ingratitude, as well as Injustice, in Creatures not to praise and glorify their Maker.

Thus that Divine and Heaven-born Mind, and those noble and excellent Faculties of Soul, which God hath bestowed on us, as they may make us capable of knowing and worshipping God, so make Religious Worship a natural piece of Justice ; and if we value the excellency of our Natures, and think it any advantage to be made so noble an Order of Beings, Gratitude as well as Justice, obliges us to employ all the Faculties of our Souls, for that high and noble End for which they were made ; that is, to know, and love, and admire, and worship

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God, the greatest and the best Being, and the most perfect Object of our Minds.

It is Ingratitude, as well as Injustice to our Maker, to debase our Natures, to make them stoop to low, mean, and vile Things : to inherit the Curse of the Serpent, to crawl upon their Bellies, and lick up the Dust of the Earth, when they were made to aspire towards Heaven, to unite themselves to God the Fountain of Life and Being, and to live in the Love and Contemplation of him. The like may be said with reference to that good Providence of God, which maintains and upholds us in Being, and provides all Necessaries for us, and defends us from all unseen Mischiefs ; both Justice and Gratitude require us to praise and adore so great and constant a Benefactor.

These are all Expressions, both of the Natural Justice and Bounty of our Wise Maker, and therefore lay a mixed Obligation on us of Justice and Gratitude. God was under no Antecedent Obligation, but his own Will and Goodness to make a World ; but if he did resolve to make one, he was under

under the Obligations of his own Wisdom, and Justice, and Goodness, to make every Creature perfect in its kind, and fitted to attain the end of its Nature, and to make some Creatures for great and noble Ends ; and consequently to bestow very noble and excellent Natures on them ; and therefore there being a mixture of Justice and Goodness in God's making and governing the World, no wonder that it lays a mixt Obligation on us too of Justice and Gratitude.

But there is another manifestation of God's Goodness in the Redemption of the World by our Lord Jesus Christ, which is a Work of such pure and unmixt Grace and Goodness, that it is all Goodness, and nothing but Goodness. Innocent Creatures may challenge a natural Right in the Care, and Protection, and Bounty of their Maker ; but a Traitor, a Rebel against the Majesty of Heaven, an Apostate Wretch, who has abused the Bounty and Goodness of his Creator, can challenge no right to those common Blessings which God bestows upon his Creatures ; so that he should cause the Sun to shine, and the Rain to fall on them ; and there-

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fore since Sin entered into the World, even those External and Temporal good Things which Sinners enjoy, are wholly owing to the Goodness and Mercy of God, and accordingly our Obligations to Gratitude and Thankfulness are so much the stronger ; and our Ingratitude in neglecting the Worship of God, the more heinous and provoking.

But much less can such Sinners reasonably expect from God, and much less challenge it as a right, that he should redeem them from that state of Misery into which they had brought themselves, by such an amazing, stupendious, and incomprehensible expression of his Love, as the Incarnation and Death, and Sufferings of his own Eternal, only begotten, and well-beloved Son : Here is such a height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the Love of God, as passeth all Understanding ; this is Grace, free Grace, the Riches of Grace, the abundant Riches of Grace : And therefore this brings us under such Obligations of Love and Gratitude, as infinitely excel all the Obligations of Natural Justice. Now we are not our

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own, but are bought with a price, and therefore must glorify God, both with our Bodies and Spirits, which are Gods : We are now redeemed, not with corruptible Things, as Silver and Gold, but with the precious Blood of Christ, as a Lamb without blemish, and without spot; who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all Iniquity, and to purify to himself a peculiar People zealous of good Works.

As the whole Oeconomy of Man's Salvation by Christ, is the effect of meer Grace and Love, so Gratitude is the only true Principle of Gospel-Obedience : to serve God out of a prevailing sense of his Goodness, to feel that constraining Love and Power of Christ's Love engaging us to live to him, who died for us.

For those Men greatly mistake the Nature and Obligations of Gratitude, who think that Gratitude leaves them at liberty to do, or not to do it, as they please ; whereas the Obligations of Gratitude, especially in our present Case, are infinitely more strong and forcible, than those of Justice, and the punishment of Ingratitude proportionably great : *For how shall we escape*

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if we neglect so great Salvation, if we refuse to hear him, who spake from Heaven to us? if we have troden under-foot the Son of God, and counted the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith we were sanctified, an unholy Thing, and have done despite unto the Spirit of Grace.

Since then we are now under such powerful Obligations, as the Love and Grace of God declared to us in the Gospel of his Son, to love, serve, and worship him; we should consider how unkind and ungrateful it is, especially in those who call themselves Christians, to slight or neglect the Worship of their God and Saviour; certainly such Men cannot expect to be saved by Christ, after all he has done and suffered for them, when they will not thank him for it, when they will not go to God in his Name. As nothing is more infamous among Men, so nothing does more provoke God than such rude Affronts of his Goodness; to sin against the Grace of the Gospel, and those surprising Discoveries and Manifestations of the Divine Goodness, argues so brutish, so diabolical a temper of mind, such a perfect contrariety and contradiction to the Nature of God, that

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such Men must naturally sink into the lowest Hell : for those who have no sense of the Gospel-Grace, who cannot be conquered nor affected with all the Charms of so powerful a Love, are as incurable as Apostate Spirits.

Fourthly; Another Aggravation of the Guilt of this Sin is, That those who are baptized and professed Christians, (and I suppose I write to none else) are under the Obligation of their Baptismal Vow to worship God ; and therefore to neglect his Worship is Perjury, and breach of Covenant ; it is an Apostacy from Christianity, tho they still retain the Name of Christians,

And dost thou know what this is, thou profane Wretch, who thinkest it lost time to serve God, who canst not spare so much time from worldly Cares, or from thy Sports and Pleasure, as to attend the Worship of God in the Assemblies of Christians? Wast thou ever Baptized ? and dost thou know what the signification of Baptism is ? That thou art taken into Covenant with God, and hast obliged thy self to serve and

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and worship him; that thou art incorporated into the Christian Church, and therefore obliged to live in the Communion of the Church, that is, to frequent Christian Assemblies, and to join in all the Parts and Offices of Religious Worship? and art not thou afraid to deal falsely and treacherously with thy God? *For Vengeance is mine, saith God, I will repay it: It is a dreadful thing to fall into the Hands of the Living God.* To have our Portion with *Hypocrites and Unbelievers*, signifies in the New Testament, the greatest miseries of the next World. Now as *Unbelievers* signifies such Infidels as obstinately refuse to believe the Gospel, when it is fairly proposed to them: So *Hypocrites* does not only signify (as some Men mistake the Word) those who counterfeit Religion, who make a fine external shew and appearance of Piety and Devotion, when they are rotten at the Heart; but it signifies those also, who live contrary to their Profession, who are, suppose, nominal and titular Christians, who have been baptized in the Name of Christ, and own his Religion as the Religion of their Country, but live lewd and pro-

profligate Lives, make no Conscience of worshipping God, nor ever think of saving their Souls: These are the Men, who are proposed as the Patterns and Examples of the severity of God's Judgments, to deter any Man from imitating their wickedness, lest they be punished with Hypocrites and Unbelievers.

Those who are baptized into the Christian Church, into the Faith and Worship of Christ, do not only forfeit all the Blessings of the Covenant, by renouncing or contradicting their Baptismal Vow, in an habitual course of a wicked and licentious Life, but become obnoxious to all the Threatnings of the Gospel in their utmost severity; which is a much worse state than the poor Heathens are in, who never heard of Christ; for they shall not be judged by the Gospel, which was never preached to them; and therefore shall not be condemned by the Gospel neither; as St. Paul tells us, *That as many as have sinned without Law, shall also perish without Law, and as many as sinned in the Law, shall be judged by the Law.* And by the same Reason we may add, *As many as have sinned*

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sinned in the Gospel, shall be judged by the Gospel. Now to perish without the Law, signifies a much easier punishment than to be judged by the Law; and to be judged by the Gospel, signifies a great deal more than that; for as God hath increased his Grace to Man-kind, so he has always annexed severer Punishments to the abuse of it: Thus our Saviour tells us, *It shall be easier for Sodom and Gomorah, in the day of Judgment, than for Capernaum. Sodom and Gomorah were as vile, infamous Places as were in the World, and God destroyed them by very memorable Judgments, by raining Fire and Brimstone on them from Heaven; but yet they never enjoyed those means of Grace which Capernaum did, where our Saviour himself preached in Person, and confirmed the Truth of his Doctrine by many mighty Works, and therefore they should escape better at the last Judgment, than Capernaum; and Capernaum, I doubt, will escape much better than the Infidels and Atheists, and profane despisers of Religion in our days, because they laboured under old and inveterate Prejudices, which could not easily be removed,* but

but required Time and Patience, and the exercise of free and impartial Reason to wear them off. But now, when the Gospel has prevailed in the World for so many Ages; when Men are educated in the Christian Religion, and have all the Prejudices of their first and early Instructions on the right side; when it is so difficult a thing to cast off their reverence for God, and to silence and stupify their clamorous Consciences: for Men to use so much Art and Industry to turn Atheists or Infidels, or profane Scoffers at Religion, will admit of no excuse, but is the highest Affront to God, and will receive the sorest Punishment, and a Sentence as amazing and astonishing as the Sin is.

Thus I have represented the evil and heinous Nature of this Sin; and if these Men do believe that there is a God, as they profess to do, would they give themselves time seriously to consider these things, I cannot imagine but it must have some good effect upon them. For can any Man, who believes a God, if he ever consider such Matters, endure the least thought of putting

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putting such a scorn and contempt upon God, as the neglect of Religious Worship does naturally signify? He knows what a sharp resentment he himself has of a slight or neglect; how ill he takes it, if Men industriously avoid his Company, if they do but talk and seem to mind something else, when he is telling a Story; if his Friends neglect to visit him, and turn their heads another way, when they pass by his Door; and he knows how sensible Superiors especially are of such neglects from their Inferiors. For a Prince to be slighted by his Subjects, or a Father by his Children, or a Master by his Servants, is thought so unufferable a rudeness, as cannot be too severely punished: And therefore considering that infinite distance which is between God and Creatures, he may easily conclude how ill God takes the neglect of his Worship, which is the greatest slight that can be put upon him, and argues very mean and contemptible Thoughts of him, if such Men did think of him at all.

And when he considers also, how many Obligations he lies under to worship God, he cannot but blush to be guilty

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guilty of so great injustice, as not to praise and magnify him, who deserves to be praised, and to be had in reverence by all those who are about him. He thinks it great injustice to detract from the Praises of worthy and deserving Men, or to conceal them; what is it then not to ascribe to God the Glory and Perfection of his Nature and Works, which are proclaimed by all the World? Not to adore and worship our Maker, who made us for this end, that we might see and speak of his Glory? Did God give me Eyes (may such a Man say) to see the Glory of this World, and an Understanding to search out the first Cause, to whom the Praise of all is due, that when I have found him, I should take no notice of him, neither confess his Power, nor admire his Wisdom, nor praise his Goodness? Did he give me a Tongue to talk of every Trifle, and never to be silent but where it ought to be most vocal, in the Praises of my Maker? How ill should I take it, could I make any Being that could understand or speak, should it refuse to acknowledg from whence it was, and to whom it owes its Being?

Con-

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Consider, my Soul, how thou shouldest resent the neglect of a Son, of a Client, of a redeemed Captive, or of any one whom thou hast obliged, and by thy Bounty raised from a low to a splendid Fortune, who owes his Being, his Fortune, his Liberty, and all the Comforts and Blessings of Life to thee. And is it nothing then to neglect the Worship of that God, who is the Universal Parent, Lord, and Benefactor of the World; who has redeemed thee with the Blood of his Son, and designed a more glorious Happiness for thee, if thy unjust and ungrateful neglects of him, do not render thee incapable of his Favour?

But how unpardonable is it, for a Man to be false to his Oaths and Covenants? Such Persons are not thought fit for Humane Conversation, who break the most Sacred Ties, and therefore can never be trusted; but yet no Man ever broke his Word, much less an Oath or Covenant, but when he expected to make some advantage of it: And shall I break the Covenant of my God? a Covenant to which I owe all my hopes of Happiness, all the Good

Good I now enjoy, and all that I expect? If I forfeit my Interest in this Covenant, I must be miserable, and perish like a Fool; and since I cannot forfeit my Interest without breaking my Covenant, I must perish like an Apostate, a Runnagate, a Traitor, or like one who deserves to suffer the worst things, but deserves no Pity; and it is so grievous a thing to worship God, that I should chuse rather to be unjust, to be ungrateful, to be perfidious to God, to forfeit his Love and Favour, and to incur his hottest Displeasure, than acknowledg that I owe all to him that I have, and that I expect all from him?

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S E C T.

SECT. III.

*Concerning the Danger of Irreligion
both with respect to this World and
the next, and the folly of it ; with
serious Exhortation to these Men
to take care of their Souls.*

Secondly ; I shall now consider the Danger of Irreligion, in neglecting or contemning the Worship of God. For those who will not be wrought upon by a sense of Justice or Gratitude, may yet be governed by the more brutish Principle of Fear. Now this Danger of this, respects both this World and the next.

1. The Danger of Irreligion, with respect to this World. Now, who ever believes there is a God, who governs all Humane Affairs, *in whom we live, move, and have our Being*, who disposes of our several Fortunes and Conditions of Life, must needs apprehend himself in great danger of being miserable here, while he neglects to adore and reverence the sovereign and

unaccountable Lord of the World.

We find throughout the Scripture, that the Promise even of Temporal Blessings and Deliverance, is made only to those, who beg it of God by their fervent and importunate Prayers. This is the course all good Men in all Ages have taken, and found the blessed success of it ; *Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in Mercy unto all them that call upon thee. Give ear, O Lord, unto my Prayer, and attend unto the Voice of my Supplications.*

In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee, for thou wilt answer me. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him, and honour him. The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him; to all that call upon him in Truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The Lord preserveth all them that love him; but the wicked will be destroyed: Where, those who love God, are those who pray unto him; and therefore the wicked, whom God will destroy, are those who do not pray to

G 2 him,

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Psal. 65. 2.

him, who neglect or despise his Worship : whence it is the *Psalmist* describes God, that he is One that heareth Prayers; *O thou that hearest Prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.*

For indeed it is not reasonable to expect that God should bestow those Blessings and Deliverances on us, which we do not think worth asking, or will not own him to have the disposal of those who will not pray for those good Things they want, will not bless God for giving them ; and no wise Man thinks it prudent to place his Favour where they shall meet with no return, which is like burying good Seed in barren Soyl, that deceives the expectation of the Husbandman.

God indeed being the Maker of the World, takes care of all his Creatures, but then he expects that reasonable Creatures should beg the protection and provisions of his Providence, because this is an excellent Instrument of Government, as it keeps Mankind under a constant sense of his Power and Providence, and in a constant dependence on him.

Those who expect all good Things from God, dare not provoke him to anger,

anger by the breach of his Laws ; Men are naturally ashamed of approaching the Presence of God, when they are conscious to themselves of any great Crime, but sneak and hide themselves, as Children do, when they have displeased their Parents, and dare not ask any kindness, till they have first obtained their Pardon ; which makes it highly reasonable and necessary for God to discountenance Irreligion, by casting off the care of such Men who refuse to worship him,

It is true, very many Irreligious Men do thrive in this World, and arrive to great Estates, and to great Honours ; for God does not make such an exact difference between good and bad Men in this Life, as he will do in the World to come, and there is no reason he should, since he can serve the Ends of his Providence in the prosperity of bad Men.

But yet there is a vast difference between God's permitting the prosperity of bad Men, and that constant Providence which watches over good Men. Bad Men may advance themselves by Injustice, Oppression, and Perjury ; but they are not advanced by the Blessing, but by the Permission of God,

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for God never blesses any wicked Arts; and therefore such Mens Prosperity is very uncertain, and as tottering as the Thrones of Usurpers: for though they have a good Title with respect to Men, yet they are but Usurpers with respect to God, and therefore are tumbled down again at his pleasure; but the only sure way of thriving in the World, is by God's Blessing; these are the only lasting and durable Riches and Honours, which are free from such Vexations and Troubles, Fears and Disappointments, as attend on unjust Possessions; as the Wise Man tells us, *The Blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.*

Prov. 10. 22.

The sum is this; It is possible for Irreligious Men to enjoy great prosperity without God's Blessing, and those who like this way may take it; but it is a very uncertain, and a very slippery way, it often ends in Poverty and Contempt, or leads to the Gallows; or Men lose their standing, when they are almost got up to the top of the Precipice, and they tumble down faster than ever they got up: But those who desire God should take care

care of them, must pray to him, and worship him ; for as St. James told those he writ to, *Ye have not, because ye ask not.* Some bad Men are for a while prosperous, but a hundred for one are miserable ; and no Man can be secure from Misery, but in the Protection of God.

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Jam. 4. 2.

Secondly ; There is a much greater Danger than this in Irreligion, and that is, The loss of our Souls, the loss of Eternal Happiness, and the miseries of an Eternal Death ; now it is *Godliness* 1 Tim. 4. 8. *which bath the promise of this Life, and of that which is to come, and the Grace of God which brings Salvation,* that is, the Gospel of Christ, which contains the Promises of eternal Life, *bath appeared unto all Men, teaching us, that denying all ungodliness and worldly Lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World.* These are the Conditions of Eternal Life, without performing which, we shall never see God ; but the intemperate, unrighteous, ungodly Men, shall be condemned to the punishment of Devils, *to outward darkness, where there is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of Teeth for evermore.*

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Tit. 2. 11, 12.

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For Godliness, which consists in such a constant sense of God, as expresses it self in all Acts of Homage, Worship, and Obedience, Is the only vital Principle of Religion ; though Men have a great many very good Qualities, and sociable Virtues ; though they are modest and temperate, just in their Dealings, pitiful to the Poor, of a liberal and generous Spirit in promoting good Designs ; very affable, courteous, and obliging in their Conversations ; yet if they have no sense of God, as these Men have not, who neglect his Worship, all this is no part of Religion, but owing to natural Temper, and good Breeding, or humane Policy, or such other Causes as may make Men good Neighbours and Citizens, but cannot make them good Christians. They may reap some Temporal Rewards of these Virtues, but they cannot carry them to Heaven, for indeed such Men are not qualified for the Work, and the happiness of Heaven, which is to know, and love, and admire, and praise the great Maker and Redeemer of the World ; which no Man can do, who hath not a quick and prevailing sense of his Excellencies and

and Perfections. And how intolerable would it be, for such Men to keep an Eternal Sabbath in Heaven, to worship God, and sing his Praises Day and Night, for ever and ever ; who think it lost time, and a dry, insipid, wearisom thing, to worship God here on Earth ? but they need not fear that Penance, for they shall never be troubled with it : None shall be received into Heaven, but those, who by the constant Exercises of Devotion on Earth, have spiritualized their Minds, and made Religion, in some measure, their Happiness, as well as their Work and Duty.

And because there are a sort of inconsiderate Men, who think to grow very religious, and to repent of all their Sins before they die, and thereby prevent the danger of Eternal Damnation, I would desire them to consider ;

Thirdly ; That the great Danger of Irreligion, of an habitual neglect of God's Worship, is, That it lets loose the Reins to all manner of Wickedness, and naturally tends to harden Men in Sin, and very often ends in down-

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down-right Atheism. Men, who have cast off all sense and reverence for God, have no other restraint from the greatest Villanies, but what the Laws of the Land, their own Natural Tempers, their Education and Converse, and such-like Considerations, lay upon them ; which can keep very few Men, who have cast off the Fear and Reverence of God, within any tolerable bounds ; and thus Men run into the wildest Excesses, and wound their Consciences, and stain their Reputations, till they grow hopeless, desperate, and impudent Sinners.

Men, who are very bad, and yet will not neglect their Prayers, nor absent themselves wholly from Christian Assemblies, do what they can, find great checks of Conscience, and have a great many sober Intervals ; they cannot say their Prayers, and confess their Sins to God, and beg his Pardon and Mercy, but their Consciences will reproach them, and put them at least upon some imperfect resolutions of amendment ; and when they attend the preaching of the Word, they often are so startled and scared, and labour under such strong Convictions, that they are not able

able to resist any longer, and the good Spirit of God does not wholly forsake those Men who attend the Publick Ministries of Grace, but sometimes works such miraculous Cures, as are the triumphs of a Sovereign Grace; and therefore the Case of these Men can never be so desperate and hopeless as theirs is, who take care to think of him as little as possibly they can, and withdraw themselves from Publick Instructions, that they may sin on without disturbance, till they drop into Hell.

Thirdly; Let us now consider the folly of Irreligion; and there is the more reason to do this, because the Irreligious and Profane, the Practical as well as the Speculative Atheist, is very apt to boast of his Wit and Understanding, and to think himself much above the ordinary Level of Mankind. But the Spirit of God calls them Fools, *The Fool bath said in his Heart, There is no God;* which is not only meant of the Speculative, but of the Practical Atheist, who though he professeth to believe that there is a God, yet lives as if there were none. And if Religion be

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*Job 28. 28.
Psal. III. 10.*

Prov. 9. 10.

be the onely true Wisdom, Irreligion must be the greatest Folly ; and yet so we are taught in Scripture, *that the fear of the Lord*, that is, the Worship of God, which is the most natural expression of our reverence of him, *that is Wisdom* ; *The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom*, a good understanding have all they that do his Commandments. *The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom, and the Knowledg of the Holy is Understanding.*

Now what I have already discoursed of the Evil and Danger, proves also the Folly of Irreligion ; for what can be more foolish, than that which contradicts the best Reason of our Minds, and our natural Obligations to worship God, founded on the highest Wisdom ? What can be more foolish, than to undermine our own Interest, to lay Trains of Misery for our selves, and to forfeit our present and future Happiness ? That is cursed, contemptible Wit, which will droll away a Man's Life and his Soul together.

But

But besides all this, the Folly of Irreligion will appear, if we consider these two Things.

i. That it transforms a Man into a Beast ; and then, though such a Man may have all the wild conceits of Apes and Monkeys, and the craft and subtlety of a Fox, yet he has not the Understanding and Wisdom of a Man. He may have an inferior sort of Wit, and may be reckoned the top and perfection of the meer Animal and Sensitive Life, but is fallen vastly below the Attainments of Men ; for it is not Reason, but Religion, which is the Glory and Perfection of Humane Nature, as every one must acknowledg, who believes that there is a God ; for God is the noblest Object of our Minds, and to adore and worship him, is to act according to the most excellent capacity of our Natures. *inquit vero O scribi nesci
propterea* I doubt not at all, but brute Creatures have an inferior degree of Reason, fitted to the low Attainments of their Natures, and that they commonly reason more wisely and truly in their own Concerns, than Irreligious Men do in theirs ; but they cannot know

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know God, nor worship him; they cannot see nor adore his infinite Perfections, their Reason is confined to a narrow compass, to those things which concern the preservation of their own Being, and the enjoyments of their Natures; and such a kind of Being is an Irreligious Man, whose Reason indeed is capable of higher and nobler flights, but is pinioned down, and confined to present and sensible Objects, and serves only to corrupt and deprave a more excellent Nature, into a brutish State.

Now if that be the true Wisdom and Glory, the specifical Difference of a Man, which distinguishes him from all inferior Creatures, then Religion, as the Scripture tells us, must be his Wisdom; and whatever Wit Irreligious Men may pretend to, being so much below the Attainments, nay, being no better than the Corruption of Humane Nature, it may set them a degree above the Wit of a Beast, but is no better than Folly in a Man.

There is not a more certain demonstration of Folly, than for Men to act foolishly, especially in Matters of

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vast Concernment; and this consideration impeaches the Irreligious Man of the most despicable Folly; as to give you some Instances of this:

Some neglect to worship God out of a careless trifling humour; they never consider what God is, how much they owe to him, how intirely they are at his disposal, what the danger and punishment of Irreligion is; and if it be Folly not to use the wisest Thoughts, and best Consideration we have, in matters of the greatest moment, then Irreligion is Folly.

Others neglect the Worship of God, because it disturbs them in the secure enjoyment of their Lusts, and puts a great many black and melancholly Thoughts into their Heads: which is just as wise, as to shut our Eyes, and run down a Precipice, because it makes us melancholly to open our Eyes and see our Danger; whereas a wise Man would rather chuse to open his Eyes, that he might see how to avoid it.

Others take offence at Religion, because they see a great many Hypocrites zealous pretenders to Religion, and they had as good never mind Religion as be Hypocrites: but is this a good

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good Reason, not to mind Religion, because Hypocrites pretend to Religion, when indeed they have none? Cannot they be sincerely Religious, though Hypocrites be not? Are there not a great many Religious Men, who are no Hypocrites? And is not that a better Reason to be Religious without Hypocrisy, than to be of no Religion, to declare to all the World that we are not Hypocrites?

Others are scandalized at the great variety of Religion, which are as contrary to each other, as Light to Darkness; and conclude, that it is to no purpose to trouble their Heads about any form of Religion, for they may be mistaken after all, and they had as good be of no Religion, as not of the right. But if these Men did but wisely consider of what infinite concernment true Religion is, they would conclude quite otherwise, that seeing there is so much dispute which is the true Religion, they would use the greater diligence and honesty to find it out, and hope that God would pardon those Mistakes, which are meerly the Errors of their Understanding, when they offer up to him a pious and devout

Irreligious Men are foolishly.

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devout Soul; they would rather conclude, that an honest Man, who is notバイassed by Interest, and does not chuse a false Religion upon a Design, will be accepted for his Sincerity and Devotion, by that God who is a merciful and compassionate Father, and very ready to pardon all invincible Mistakes, when they are not made invincible by our own Fault; But to cast off all Religion, because there is some difficulty in finding the right, is just as if a Traveller, when he meets with a great many cross Wayes, should resolve to go no farther, for fear he should mistake the right Road, though he is sure that he shall never get home if he go no farther.

Others are so tired with their Secular Affairs, and hard Labour all the Week, that truly they must make Sunday a Holy Day, not for Devotion, but for Rest and Pastime, as a Holy Day commonly now signifies; and therefore they cannot go to Church, which will tire them more than all their Weeks Work did; that is to say, They feel the Wants and Necessities of their Bodies, and must take care of them, but their Souls must shift for themselves; they cannot bear hunger

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and cold, and nakednes; but never consider, *Who can dwell with devouring Fire? who can dwell with everlasting Burnings?* But more of this presently.

Such kind of foolish Reasonings as these, make Men neglect the Worship of God; and should any Man act so reason so weakly in his Worldly Affairs, he would be beg'd for a Fool, if he were worth the keeping.

Thus I have endeavoured to convince these Men of the Evil, Danger, and Folly of Irreligion; I now proceed to the second Thing proposed to perswade them to take care of their Souls.

2. Let me therefore earnestly exhort all Men to take care of their Souls; for this is the true Reason why they neglect the Worship of God, because they are sottishly unconcerned what will become of their Souls after Death, whether they shall be happy or miserable in the World to come. For all Men, who made it the greatest Business of their Lives to get to Heaven, who are impatiently desirous to see God, and to enjoy him, who are

afraid of nothing so much, as of being banished from his Presence. I say, these Men are serious and hearty in their Religion, They seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness. For though Religious Worship be a Natural Debt, which we owe to God as we are his Creatures, yet God in great wisdom and goodness has so ordered all the parts of Worship, that we may at the same Time, and in the same Act, worship and glorify God, and serve and supply the Wants and Necessities of our own Souls. The Worship of Innocent Creatures, consisted principally in praising that great, wise, and bountiful Maker and Governor of the World; but the Religion of Sinners is fitted to a lapsed state, to heal and recover our Souls, to restore us to the Perfection and Happiness of our Natures, and to entitle us to new and glorious Rewards.

Since we are Sinners, God hath made it one part of Religious Worship, and given us great encouragement, to confess our Sins; and to ask pardon and forgiveness for them; And can any Man, who loves his Soul, and considers, that the Wages of Sin is Death,

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Death, be cautious in suing out his Pardon. Must thou die eternally, Sinner, unless thou obtainest thy Pardon from God, and wilt thou not fall down upon thy Knees, and lie prostrate in the Dust before him? Dost thou think it sufficient to reserve this Work for thy last Breath, when thou art so hasty to procure a Pardon from thy Prince, when thou hast only forfeited a perishing Estate, or a mortal Life? Me-thinks I should see thee run with all speed to Church, for fear thou shouldst come too late to offer up thy Confessions and Prayers with the Congregation, by the Mouth of Gods Minister, who is appointed to pray for thee, and to receive that reviving Absolution which is promised to all humble Penitents, confessing and praying Sinners. And since our own unworthiness, our manifold and great Sin, might justly discourage us from approaching the Presence of so Holy a God; God has in infinite Mercy provided a great High-Priest for us, to offer up our Prayers to God, and to intercede for us; and has commanded us to come to him in his Name; and shall we forfeit our Interest in our Saviour?

visitour's Intercession, by neglecting to beg Pardon in his Name. For the Work of our great High-Priest, is to offer up our Prayers to God, incensed and perfumed with his own Merits; But this supposes, that we must offer up our Prayers to God in his Name; and therefore those who do not pray to God in Christ's Name, have no part nor interest in his Intercession. He is an Advocate for none but those who Worship God in his Name. And since our Natures are greatly corrupted, and we are very weak and unable to serve God in an acceptable manner, in our own strength; God has made it a part of his Worship to beg the supplies of his Grace, and has promised to give his Holy Spirit to them who ask him; and when we find, by daily experience, how liable we are to the Assaults of Temptations, and how easily we are conquered by them; and know how impossible it is ever to get to Heaven, unless we be renewed and sanctified by the Holy Ghost; Can any Man, who loves his Soul, expose himself naked and unarmed to a tempting World and Devil, without so much as begging the Auxiliary Forces, and Di-

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vine Aids of the Holy Spirit, which we may have for asking, but shall never have without. You are glad of any help and assistance to promote your secular Interest. When a City is besieged by powerful and numerous Enemies, they send Embassadors to their Allies and Confederates, and will never want help for want of asking it; and shall we be so foolish as to become the triumph and the scorn, and a prey to our Spiritual Enemies, for want of crying to God to save us? Thus say I.

For the same Reason, our blessed Lord has appointed and instituted the Holy Feast of his Sacramental Body and Blood, as a conveyance of new Life and Grace to us; and have those Men any care of their Souls, as well as any honour for their crucified Lord who deny themselves so inestimable a priviledg of feasting on the Symbols of Christ's Body and Blood? which seals to all worthy Communicants the pardon of their Sins, and more firmly unites them to Christ their Head, and to each other, and intitles them to the powerful influence of that Divine Spirit, which dwells in, actuates, and governs the whole Church and Body of Christ. Thus



Thus we are very ignorant, and very unmindful of our Duty, and God in great goodness has appointed a whole Order of Men, whose Business it is to instruct us, to teach us what we do not know, and to mind us of those Things which we are apt to forget, and has made it our Duty, and a part of his Worship, to attend their Instructions. And though I hope, in such an Age, and such a Church as this, there are a great many Christians so knowing, that they need not be taught their Duty; yet it is sad to consider how many very ignorant Professors there are, that want to be instructed in the first Rudiments of Christian Knowledge; and warm, zealous, and frequent Exhortations, are of great use to the most knowing Christians.

And though a great many, who have little other Religion, are forward enough to hear Sermons, yet it grieves me to think how many there are who will live, die, and perish for ever in their Ignorance, because they refuse Instruction; who can never be persuaded to attend, either Sermons, or Catechising, or so much as reading the

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Scripture ; and yet these very Men could be contented to hear a large discourse of News, or Trade, or Merchandise ; or how they might order their Affairs to better advantage, and are glad to be told of any Mistake or Error which might have been prejudicial to them in their secular Affairs. And I need not tell you the Reason of this Difference, they are in very good earnest to get this World, but are very indifferent and unconcerned about the next. So that all the parts of Religious Worship, as they are expressions of our Reverence and Devotion for God, so they immediately tend to the happiness of our Souls ; the Virtue of them is seen, in transforming us into a Divine Nature, in obtaining the Pardon of our Sins, and the Supply of God's Grace, in making us Holy here, and eternally Happy hereafter ; and therefore if we love our Souls, let us constantly exercise our selves in all the Parts and Offices of Religious Worship.

And me-thinks, it should be no such hard Matter to persuade Men to love and take care of their Souls ; for can any man have a greater Concernment

ment in the World than this? For to love our Souls, signifies no more than to love our Selves, and to take care of our own happiness; for the Soul is the Man, the Body is only the Organ, and Instrument of the Soul, an earthly Tabernacle, wherein it dwelleth this state of its Pilgrimage, but it is our Soul only that is capable of Joy and Pleasure, or Grief and Sorrow; and therefore as the Soul is either happy or miserable, so is the Man. And yet all Men desire to be happy; this they seek with unwearied endeavour; this makes all that bustle and stir that is in the World, that all Men are a chasing after happiness, and scrambling for it: Why then would you say, What is the Dispute and Difficulty, since all Men do love their Soul, that is, desire to be happy? and it is only the Soul that relishes Happiness, or is the Subject wherein Happiness dwells?

This is true, and yet very few Men love their Souls; for we must consider, that the Soul of Man is capable of a two-fold happiness; one as it lives in this gross Body of Flesh and Blood; another as it lives without it in a separate state, or receives it again refined and

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and purged, made a Heavenly and Spiritual Body.

Now as the Soul dwells in these Earthly Bodies, it is apt to be mightily pleased with sensual Enjoyments, and such Objects as are represented to us by our Senses; and this is the Happiness which most Men are fond of in this World, which tempts them to all those sensual Lusts which St. John comprises under the *Lusts of the Flesh, the Lusts of the Eye, and the Pride of Life*; but now this is not the greatest happiness of the Soul, because dwelling in this Body is not its most perfect State; it is to dwell but a little while in this Body, and then can enjoy these bodily Pleasures no longer, and therefore that is called the happiness of the Soul, which is agreeable to its most perfect state of Life, and commensurate to an eternal duration.

So that the Controversy in short is this, Whether we will prefer an imperfect, unsatisfactory, momentary Happiness, or such a Happiness, which is the biggest our Souls are capable of, and will last to Eternity; and it is strange there should be any difficulty in this choice.

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For can an Immortal Being, who is to live Eternal Ages, be satisfied with such perishing Joys as wax old, and expire in half an Age? It would be thought very strange, that an Immortal Creature should grow weary of Life, and be contented to fall into nothing after threescore or fourscore Years; and yet this is a much more reasonable desire, than to chase such a happiness as will last but sixty or eighty Years, when we must live for ever, and therefore the Atheist is much a wiser Man than an irreligious and profane Worldling.

Every one contemns the Folly of such a Prodigal, who spends a fair Estate in a very short time, and walks away the rest of his Life in Poverty and Beggary; and yet three or four Years pleasure bears some proportion to threescore or fourscore Years; but threescore or fourscore Years have no proportion at all to Eternity.

Were there no other punishment of such Folly, but to live for ever in a sense of our want, to find no suitable Objects to entertain our Minds, but to languish perpetually, with pining and unsatisfied Desires; yet this were like

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the pain of perpetual Hunger and
Thirst, some what worse than the de-
lays of Hope, even the Torment of
Despair.

And yet it is much worse still than
this; for such Men, when they come
into the other World, will be convin-
ced what Happiness lies they have lost,
when they shall see them come from the
East and from the West, from the North
and from the South, and sit down with
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the King-
doms of God, and themselves cast out;
when they shall see Victorious Saints,
who have triumphed over all the For-
ties and Vanities, all the Smiles, Flat-
teries and Terrors of this World, clo-
thed with bodies of pure Light, and
rewarded with Immortal Crowns
of Glory, singing Eternal Hallelujahs
to their God and Saviour; and when
all the toys and pleasures of this World
are gone and past, and nothing is pre-
sent but the happiness of the next, it
will infinitely more affect them to think
they have missed of Heaven, than it
would do now to lose their Estates and
Honours, and let slip any opportunity
they had to make themselves the Uni-
versal Monarchs of the World.

And

of greatest Concernment to us.

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And yet it is much worse than this too ; for such Men will not only miss of Heaven, but sink into Hell, a place of endless Torments, where there is no ease, and no hope. So well might our Saviour ask that Question, *What shall it profit a Man to gain the whole World, and to lose his own Soul ? Or, what shall a Man give in Exchange for his Soul ?* And can any thing in the World deserve more of our care and industry, than to obtain eternal Happiness, and to avoid eternal Misery ? And yet this cannot be done, without a sincere and devout performance of all the Acts of Religious Worship. Those Persons do not deserve to be God's Friends and Favourites who do not worship him, and those are not capable of the Joys of Heaven, who cannot relish the Pleasures of Religion, and the Worship of God.

C H A P.

PART I.**C H A P. II.**

Concerning those who forsake Christian Assemblies, for want of a due sense of the Nature and Necessity of Publick Worship. Several proofs of the Necessity of Publick Worship; from the Nature of Religious Worship; from the Nature of the Mosaick Worship; from the Institution of a Christian Church, and the Nature of Christian Worship and Discipline.

Others there are; who either wholly, or in a great measure, forsake our Communion, for want of a due sense of the Nature and Necessity of Publick Worship; They acknowledg it is their Duty to worship God, but they think they can worship God as well at Home as at Church; that it is not the Place which makes their Prayers more or less effectual; but

but God hears us, where-ever we pray, and is always pleased, even with the single and private Devotions of good Men; and the World is now so well stored with good-Books, that they can spend their time in reading at Home to as good purpose, as if they went to Church to hear a Sermon. And I need not observe how many there are who Act according to these Principles, i. e. who seldom or never come to Church, though how they spend their Time at home I know not; but have great reason to suspect, that with too many, a warm Bed in the morning, and a Bottle of Wine in the Afternoon, serves instead even of their private Devotions.

Now before I proceed to shew what a great and dangerous mistake this is, I shall briefly expostulate the Case with these Men, supposing it to be as they say, That we may serve God very acceptably at Home, without attending the publick Assemblies of Christians. Supposing the Case to be equal in it self considered, yet I beseech you, Why should you prefer your own Private before the Publick Devotions of the Church? Cannot you serve God,

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at least as well at Church as you do at Home? And Publick Worship having bin the universal Practice of the World in all Ages, and under all Religions, does it become a Modest Man to affront so general a Custom, which if it be not expressly commanded by God, yet at least has no hurt in it? And since the generality of Mankind have not only consented in such a Practice, but have believed it to be their Duty, to pay their join'd and publick Acknowledgments to their Universal Lord and Father; and are apt to suspect these Men of Atheism and Irreligion, who deny or neglect it: What Reason can be sufficient to perswade any Religious Man to oppose so universal a Belief, and to incur the publick Censures of Infidelity and Irreligion?

Especially since the publick Exercise of Religion is enjoyed by Humane Laws; and to neglect it, is an affront to the publick Wisdom and Authority of a Nation; which, though other things were equal, makes publick Assemblies a Duty, and private Devotion when we ought and may attend on publick Assemblies, to be a Sin.

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30 And indeed we cannot imagine, that God should take it well of any Man, how devout soever he be in private, who will rather affront the Universal Practice, founded upon as Universal a Consent of Mankind, will rather be thought an Atheist or an Infidel; will rather trample upon all Humane Authority, than joyn with his Fellow-Creatures, and Subjects, and Neighbours, in the publick Acts of his Worship.

Put the case any of you were the Father of a very numerous off-spring; and that without any express Command from you, most of your Children should agree by a common consent to visit you together once a week to ask your Blessing, and pay their thankful Acknowledgments for your great care of them in their Education; and in that liberal Provision you have made for them; but one or two of your Children should chuse to come alone to you in private, when no body sees them, and obstinately refuse to come with the rest of their Brethren; though they were censured by them with undutifulness and ingratitude for such a Neglect. I am apt to think,

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there is none of you would accept of such private Acknowledgments, from those who refused the more publick and solemn Addresses: and we have as little reason to expect acceptance from God, when we refuse to worship him in the Congregation of his Saints, how devout soever we are alone.

Nay, though we should grant, that private Devotions were as acceptable to God as Publick, supposing they were performed with equal Zeal and Fervency of Mind, yet upon this account Publick Worship has much the advantage; good Company in all Cases is apt to give us greater briskness and vigour of Mind: the very presence of devout Souls, who breath forth their ardent Desires to God, is enough to fire our cold and chill Spirits, and good Men receive warmth and quickness from each other, and grow into greater ardours and transports: Hypocrites have no other sense of Devotion, but what they receive from good Company; but good Men themselves, who have a true and constant sense of God, many times experience a great difference in this respect, between their private Retirements,

and the more publick and solemn Acts
of Worship.

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Thus you see, that though we could produce no express proof of the necessity of publick Worship ; yet there are sufficient reasons to prevail with every wise and good Man, not to withdraw himself from the Communion of Religious Assemblies ; and therefore indeed we shall never find that a truly wise and good Man does. Private Devotion may be a pretence to justify the neglect of publick Worship ; but I dare appeal to these Men's own Consciences, that it is never the true Cause ; for Men who do heartily desire to worship God, will chuse to worship him in the best and most solemn manner, that is, in the publick Assemblies of Christians. But yet to take away this very pretence from them, I come now to consider our Obligations to publick Worship.

I. And first I shall argue from the Nature of Religious Worship, and the fundamental Reasons of it. Now Worship signifies all that part of Religion, which immediately respects God, as it is distinguished from Sobriety and Right-

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Tit. 2.12.

teonsness, and is commonly known by the name of Godliness; as the Apostle divides the several Duties of Religion into three parts, living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World. And the proper Notion of worshipping God, is to honour him; all the several Acts of Worship honour God, as they signify our great sense and devout acknowledgment of his Being, Power, and Providence, of the Excellencies and Perfections of his Nature, our dependence on him, submission to him, trust and affiance in him; such as are great and venerable apprehensions of God, Prayers, Praises, Thanksgiving, and the like.

Now every Man must acknowledg, that Honour is always the greater, the more publick it is. That he who has great and admiring Thoughts of God, and publishes this to the World in the most solemn manner, honours God a great deal more, than he who keeps these Thoughts to himself, and praises God so privately, that no Man knows it but himself. The Prophet David resolved to make his Praises of God as publick as he could; *I will declare thy*
Psal. 22. 22. Name unto my Brethren; in the midst of
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the Congregation will I praise thee. And exorts others, to exalt him in the Congregation of the People, and praise him in the Assemblies of the Elders. Praise ye the Lord, I will praise the Lord with my whole Heart, in the Assembly of the Upright, and in the Congregation.

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Psi. 107. 32.

Psal. 111. 1.

And besides this, we may consider, that there are two parts of Worship ; the Worship of the Mind, which consists in honouring God with devout and pious Affections, in bowing our Souls before him ; and the external and visible expressions and significations of this Honour, which is external and visible Worship, such as praying and praising God with an audible Voice, falling down on the ground, kneeling, uncovering the Head, and those other outward Expressions of Devotion, which signify the humble and devout Affections of the Mind ; now though these external signs of Honour may and ought to be used in Private and Closer-Devotions, so it be with due caution, not to make them publick, which is a piece of Pharisaical Hypocrisy ; yet the proper use of them is in publick Acts of Worship, to testify our concurrence and agreement with
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And if we enquire into the fundamental Reasons of Worship, we shall find our Obligations much more strong to publick than to private Worship, though that be our Duty also, especially when we want such publick Opportunities.

The natural Reason of worshipping God, is, that he is the most excellent and perfect Being, the great and universal Parent and Benefactor, and the Sovereign Lord and Judge of the World; for it becomes us to acknowledg and adore him who is our Maker, in whom *we live, move, and have our being*; who feeds and cloaths us, who defends us from Evil, *who encompasseth us with his loving kindness and tender mercies*; and therefore these are the Subjects of most of those Forms of Worship, Prayer and Thanksgiving, which we find recorded in Scripture, especially in the Writings of the Old Testament.

Now all this is a more cogent Reason for publick than for private Worship; for though we are bound to acknowledg those particular Favours and Blessings which God hath bestowed on us, which is the foundation of private

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Worship; yet God is not so much to be considered a private, as a publick Benefactor, as an universal Parent, and sovereign Lord, and therefore must be worshipped as a publick Benefactor, that is, with publick Worship; for there is no visible Worship of God, as the Supream Lord of the World, unless it be publick. And since all Mankind are God's Creatures, and the Subjects of his Care and Providence, and an every one of them bound to worship the same God, natural Reason will inform us, that we ought all to join in the same Acts of Worship, which gives a greater awe and solemnity to it; for we cannot think that Man was made sociable Creature for every thing else, but only for Acts of Worship, which is his highest end and greatest Perfection; and therefore if Men unite themselves into Societies, for Civil Order and Government, it is as highly reasonable that they should unite for Religious Worship, unless we think that Bodies Politick, Kingdoms, and Commonwealths, are not bound to worship God, as every particular Person is; though it be an old Maxim of Government, That Religion is the surest Bond and

and Cement of Civil Societies. Especially when we consider, that the greatest Blessings we are to praise God for, are such as are bestowed on us in common with others, or all Mankind; such as the influences of Heaven, and the fruitfulness of the Earth; the blessing of Peace and Plenty; deliverance from Enemies; the advantages of good Government, and all other National Mercies; and above all, the Redemption of the World by our Lord Jesus Christ. So that God is defrauded of his Glory, if our Acknowledgments be not as publick as his Blessings are: For private Praises are not just Returns, nor due Acknowledgment of publick Mercies. And therefore when the Psalmist celebrates the publick Mercies of God, he invites all *Israel* to join in his Praises: *Praise ye the Lord; sing unto the Lord Ps. 149. 1,2.*
with Song, and with praise in the Congregation of Saints. Let Israel rejoice
in him that made him; let the Children
of Zion be joyful in their King. And all this is confirmed by the universal practice of Mankind, who though they differed in the Objects and Nature of their Worship, yet all agreed in making their Worship publick and solemn; and

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Secondly; Let us now consider what that Worship is which God himself instituted and ordained; and I shall at present instance in the Jewish Worship, which was typical also of the Christian. Now it is so evident, that every part of the Jewish Worship, which God commanded by *Moses*, was of a publike Nature, and to be performed in a publick manner, that I need not insist on the proof of it.

Their several sorts of Sacrifices were to be offered at the Tabernacle or Temple, by the Priests who were publick Persons; even those particular Sacrifices which were offered for particular Men, either Expiatory or Eucharistical, to make atonement for their Sins, or to be an Oblation of praise for particular Mercies, were yet offered in the Temple; and besides this, they had Sacrifices for the whole Congregation, as on the great day of Expiation, which was not for any particular Man, but for the whole Body of the People, and therefore considered them all as united in the same Religion and Worship. God

In God appointed also a publick Place of Worship, *wiz.* the Tabernacle or Temple at *Jerusalem*; and a publick place for Worship can be of no use, if there were no Obligation to publick Worship.

God also instituted publick Times of Worship, the Seventh day Sabbath, their New Moons and Annual Festivals, when all their Males were to appear three times a Year before the Lord: And such Times as these are described by calling *Assemblies*, and *solemn Meetings*; Isa. 1. 13. because then they met together for publick Worship: for indeed it seems to be a contradiction to appoint publick and solemn Times for private Worship. If Men are bound only to worship God in private, there is no need of publick Days of Rest dedicated to God's Worship, for every Man may take his own Time for it; as he finds most convenient and useful; but fixed and stated Times of Worship, do necessarily suppose publick Worship, and evidently prove, that Solemn and Publick Days for Worship are not sanctified merely by private Acts of Worship. And therefore we may consider further, that God entred into

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Covenant with the Children of *Israel*, not as particular Persons, but as the Seed of *Abraham*, as a People and Nation whom he had chose for himself, to be his peculiar Inheritance; and therefore every part of his Covenant (and the institution of Religious Worship, is none of the least part of it) concerns them as a Nation: So that this was a National Covenant, and a National Religion and Worship; and I need add no more, to prove that, according to God's Institution, it was publick Worship; for God was the King of *Israel*; and therefore required publick Homage from them, as other Princes expect from their Subjects; as publick, I say, though he could challenge more divine Regards than earthly Princes, because he was their God as well as their King. And therefore the Children of *Israel* themselves are frequently called the *Congregation of Israel*, and the whole *Congregation*, as consisting of such Persons as used to meet together for publick Worship, who had a right to worship at the Tabernacle of the *Congregation*.

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Let us then, thirdly, consider the Religion of our Saviour, and what Obligations that lays on us to all the Acts of Publick Worship.

Now I need not tell you, that Christ has instituted a Church, which is so often in the Writings of the Apostles called a *Church*, and the *Church of Christ*. Now ἐκκλησία properly signifies a Meeting and Assembly, which is called together, and so acquaints us what the Nature of a Christian Church is, that it is a Society of Men united and combined together in the Faith and Worship of Christ; For the Church of Christ is purely a Religious Society. Our Saviour had no Temporal Kingdom, as the Jews expected; his Kingdom was not of this World, and therefore his Church is nothing else but a Society of Men for the Worship of God through Christ; which is a plain demonstration, that every Member of the Christian Church is bound to join in all the Offices of publick Worship; for there can be no Christian Church, if there be no publick Worship, because the Christian Church is a Religious Society; that is, a Society instituted



ted for Religious Worship; nor can he be a Member of the Christian Church, who wholly neglects or despises publick Worship; for he can at best be only a nominal Member of an Assembly, who neglects to assemble with them, especially when it is essential to our Membership to frequent such Assemblies.

Now we may safely conclude, that Christ would never have instituted a Church, or Religious Assembly for publick Worship, had not publick Worship been much more acceptable to God than our private Devotions; had it been so indifferent, as some Men presume, whether we worship God singly, or in a Body and Society; whether at Home in our Closet, or in the publick Congregation.

And we may observe farther, That this Church is called the *Body of Christ*, and the Apostle tells us, that there is but one *Body*, and one *Spirit*, even as you are called in one hope of your Calling: Now to be one *Body*, as all good Christians are, if Christ have but one *Body*, signifies a very near and intimate union between all the Members of the *Body*; this is agreed by all, but then the

Ephes.4.4.

the Question is, wherein this Unity consists? Some place the Unity of Christians in one Faith, in believing all the Articles of the Christian Faith, or in having a mutual Kindness and Charity, and it must be acknowledged, that these are absolutely necessary to unite Christians, to make them *the one Body of Christ*. But yet this is not all, for there may be great Dissensions and Schisms, where there is but one Faith; as it was of old in those fearful Schisms of the *Noravians* and *Donatists*, who differed not in Matters of Faith, but Discipline; and as our own sad Experience convinces us at this Day; and Men may exercise a Christian Charity and Forbearance to each other, without being Members of the same Body; and therefore we must consider, that *this one Body is one Church*; and the Unity of a Church, or Religious Assembly, must of necessity consist in one Communion; and therefore he who separates himself from Christian Communion, who forsakes the Publick Assemblies for Religious Worship, destroys the Unity of the Church: which is a sufficient Argument, that publick Worship, when we can enjoy the

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the Opportunities of it, is essential to the Notion and Being of a Christian Church.

And therefore we find, that this was the constant practice of Christians from the very first Foundations of a Christian Church. Thus we read of those new Converts,

That they continued steadfastly in the Apostles Doctrine and Fellowship, and in breaking of Bread and in Prayers.

And they continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and in breaking Bread from House to House did eat their Meat with gladness and singleness of Heart.

Here you see the Example of the first Christians, they continued in the fellowship of the Apostles, in the communion of Doctrine, Sacraments, and Prayers, which is the true description of the Unity of the Christian Church; and therefore the Christian Church is

called, a Communion or Fellowship. The which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that you may have fellowship with us, (κοινωνία, that you may become Christians, and enter into our Society) and truly our Fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And therefore the Sacrament

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of Baptism is our admission into the Christian Church ; that is, gives a right to all the Privileges of Christian Communion, for we are *baptized into one Body* ; and the Sacrament of the Lord's

^{1 Cor. 12.}

Supper is expressly called the *Communion* ; it is that common Table which all Christians have a right to ; *The Cup of Blessing which we bless, is it not the Communion of the Blood of Christ ? the Bread which we break, is it not the Communion of the Body of Christ ? For we being many, are one Bread, and one Body ; for we are all partakers of that one Bread.* It is essential to the nature of the Lord's Supper, that it is a common Feast of which all Christians partake ; for it signifies not only our Union to Christ, but our Union to one another in the same Body ; for which Reason the Reformed Churches universally condemn the Private Masses of the Church of *Rome*, where the Priest receives by himself ; and truly, private Devotions, when they thrust out publick Worship, are much of the same nature.

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^{1 Cor. 10.}

^{27.}

So that the very Institution of a Church, the Example of the Primitive Christians, and those Sacraments of our

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Religion, which our Saviour has instituted as the Badges of Christianity, and the Conveyances of Spiritual Life and Grace, may convince us how necessary Christian Communion and Publick Worship is, if we will be the Disciples of Christ, and we are expressly commanded by the Writer to the *Hebrews*, *Not to forsake the assembling of our selves together.*

But we may consider farther, that Christ has instituted an Evangelical Priesthood, the publick Ministers of Religion, whom he has commanded to instruct his Church, to feed his Flock, to pray for his People, and to bless in his Name, to whom he has committed the Power of the Keys, to let in, or to shut out of the Church. Now what use could there be for publick Ministers, unless publick Worship were a great and necessary Duty? If it were so indifferent a thing, whether Christians frequent the Religious Assemblies, and continue in their Doctrine and Fellowship, breaking Bread and Prayers, it does not seem worth the while to have invested Men with such Power and Authority, which is of so little use, especially since Christianity

nity is so much known; and so far spread in the World; whereas our Saviour promises to be with his Apostles unto the end of the World; which could not be meant of the Persons of the Apostles, for they are long since dead; but of their Successors, who retain their Office and Power, as far as is necessary to the present state of the Church.

And the force of this Argument from the Apostolical Office will be better understood, if we consider whether in the Power of the Keys consists, which Christ committed to St. Peter, and the rest of the Apostles, or what is the true ancient Discipline of the Christian Church. Now the Power of the Church, which is truly Spiritual, consists only in letting into the Church or shutting out. The admission into the Church, is by administering Baptism, which they are made the external Judges of, who are fit to be received into the Church by Baptism, and who not; shutting out of the Church, is by exercising Censures upon Offenders, which consists only in this, in removing such Men from Christian Communion, either in part or wholly, for

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a time or for ever, according to the verity of the ancient Discipline. Some were not permitted to come into the Christian Assemblies, but lay at the door lamenting their wickedness, and begging their Prayers. Others were admitted to publick Instructions, but not to the Communion of Prayers; or at least if they were admitted to the Prayers of the *Catechumens*, those who were publickly instructed and catechised, but not yet baptized, yet they were not allowed to be present at the Prayers of the Faithful. Others were admitted to Prayers, but not to the Supper of the Lord. Now all this supposes, that Christian Communion is not only a necessary Duty, but a great Priviledg, since they had no other way of punishing Offenders, but by denying them the liberty of Worship in their Assemblies; but what would those Men value Church-Censures, who make so slight of publick Worship, as daily to excommunicate themselves? Certainly these Men are greatly mistaken, or else the very Office and Authority of an Apostle, is a very inconsidetable thing, and that dreadful Sentence of Excommunicati-

on, which was so formidable in the Ancient Church, is a very innocent and harmless thing, since Men may as well worship God alone as in Christian Assemblies ; and that they might do, when excommunicated or shut out of Christian Assemblies.

And I observe farther, That our Saviour requires of us, the publick profession of his Name and Worship, which necessarily includes publick Worship ; *Whosoever therefore shall confess me before Men, him will I confess before my Father which is in Heaven* ; but *whoever shall deny me before Men, him will I deny before my Father which is in Heaven*. To confess Christ, is to own him for our Lord and Saviour, not only in words (though too many such there are, whom our Saviour will not own, will not confess before his Father which is in Heaven) but by paying him such publick Honour and Worship, as is a visible demonstration, that we do own him for our Lord. For thus to confess Christ signifies ; *With the mouth Rom. 14. Confession is made unto Salvation* ; for ^{10, 13.} *whoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord, shall be saved.*

The Duty of Christian Magistrates

The Christian Church was to be a Visible Society, *like a City that is set on a Hill, or like a Candle placed in a Candlestick, to give light to all that are in the House*: But the Church can never be visibly distinguished from the rest of the World, without the publick and visible exercise of Religion; and therefore our Saviour exhorts his Disciples; *Let your Light so shine before Men that they may see your good Works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven*; which must refer to all parts of Religion, and therefore includes Acts of Worship, as well as Acts of Mercy and Charity.

To conclude this Argument, It is the acknowledged Duty of a Christian Prince, to take care to encourage and propagate true Religion in his Dominions; which can never be done without encouraging publick Worship, correcting publick Abuses, and punishing the neglect or profanation of it: for if Mens Religion be confined to their Closets, no Man can possibly tell what Religion they are of; they may be Pagans, Mahometans, Papists, or Infidels, and no Man the wiser, if they

they can but keep their own counsel : And therefore if it be the Duty of Magistrates to encourage and reform Religion, and yet nothing can fall within his cognizance, or under his care, but what is publick, it is easy to conclude, That publick Worship, which is the care of publick Magistrates, is the Duty also of private Christians.

Possibly some may think, that I have taken a great deal of needless pains in proving so plain a Thing ; and truly I should think so too, were I not sensible by my own experience, how many profest Christians there are, who have very little apprehension of the necessity of publick Worship ; and therefore sometimes come to Church to comply with the fashion of the Place ; and sometime stay at Home, to comply with their own careless Humours.

If any such read these Papers, I would desire and beg of them, seriously to consider this Matter, and not to abuse themselves by some childish and sophistical Reasonings, into a

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Neglect so dishonourable to God, and so destructive to their Souls.

Suppose you did really (as some fear only pretend) spend your time in private Prayer, and Reading and Meditation, yet can you reasonably expect that God should accept, should hear and answer your private Prayers, when they signify a Neglect, if not a Contempt of publick Worship? which is so much more pleasing to him, as it is more honourable to be praised by a multitude of devout Souls in the Face of the Sun, than in a secret Corner, where no Body sees nor hears us. Can you think your single Prayers will as much prevail with God, as when the fervent and ardent Desires of a Christian Assembly are offered up to God by a publick Minister of Religion, whom our Saviour has appointed to pray for us, and to bless in his Name? Can you any where expect such plentiful effusions of the Divine Grace and Spirit, as in the Congregation of the Saints, while we attend on Divine Institutions, which are never without a Blessing annexed unto them, when there

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are Subjects capable of receiving it? There is time enough for our private Devotions, without neglecting or affronting publick Worship. And when we remember that Christ has promised to be present in Christian Assemblies; Where-ever two or three are gathered together in his Name; and that God prefers the Gates of Sion, the place of publick Worship, before all the Dwellings of Jacob, it should make us long and thirst after the Courts of God, and be glad when they say, Let us go up into the House of the Lord.

Comit with you of gladness, such

as will add to your joy.

CHAP. II. **C H A P.**

C H A P. III.

Concerning those who plead Conscience for their Separation, and set up distinct Communions of their own.

S E C T. I.

Containing several Directions to such Men, whereby to try their Honesty and Sincerity in this Matter.

THe third sort of Men, who forsake our Religious Assemblies, are those who pretend Conscience for their Separation, and set up distinct Communions of their own ; who separate for fear of Sin ; and think themselves bound, as they honour God, and love their own Souls, to avoid our Communion. Now these Men deserve our most tender regard ; for if they be in good earnest, it is very great pity that those who are so desirous to please God,

The difference between Conscience, &c.

Ch^r. 3.

God, and to save their Souls, should fall into such dangerous Mistakes. But yet I do not intend to dispute the terms of our Communion with them at this time; there are so many excellent Books writ in defence of the Church of *England*, that there is no want of Instruction for those, who are honest and inquisitive; and therefore at present I shall take another Method, which I hope may prove more effectual, than disputing commonly does. And I shall reduce what I have to say, under these three Heads.

First, To put them upon some Inquiries, with reference to their honesty, and sincerity in this Matter.

Secondly, To offer some general Considerations for their Satisfaction.

Thirdly, To remove some popular Pleas and Objections.

First, To put them upon some Inquiries, with reference to their honesty and sincerity in this Matter. For those who plead Conscience for disobeying their Governors in Church or State, offer such an insufferable affront to God, if they be Hypocrites, and carry on other Designs under a pretence of Conscience, that woe be to that Man



Man, that whiteth painted Sepulchre,
how glorious a Profession soever he
makes, who is thus rotten at the
Heart. And in order to discover your
honesty and sincerity, I shall desire
every Man, as he fears God, and loves
his Soul, and hopes for Mercy at the
terrible appearance of our Lord Jesus
Christ, when he shall come again to
judg the Quick and the Dead, to give
a sincere Answer to these following
Questions.

First; Whether he do indeed sepa-
rate from the Communion of our Pa-
rish Churches, upon true Principles of
Conscience? To pretend to Conscience
for any Thing, is to pretend the Au-
thority of God; for God alone is the
Supream Lord and Governaour of our
Consciences in all Cases, where he in-
terposes his Authority; and to pre-
tend the Authority of God for dis-
obeying our Governors, and dividing
the Church, when we have no such
Authority, is like counterfeiting the
King's Broad Seal to justify Treasons
and Rebellions.

Few Men make any difference be-
tween their privat Judgments, Opinions
of

of Things, and their Conscience ; that is, between their own Authority, and the Authority of God ; what-ever fancy comes into their Heads, is called their Conscience, and then they think they are bound to prefer their own private and groundless Conceits, before all the visible Authority of Church and State. And if this Principle be once admitted, it is impossible there should be any lasting Peace and Unity in Church or State. No Man must act against his Conscience, that is, he must not do any thing which he knows God has expressly forbid, nor neglect doing any thing which he knows God has commanded. A Divine Law is the Rule of Conscience, and all the Powers of the World cannot deliver us from the Obligation of it ; in such Cases we must rather chuse to obey God than Men, what-ever we suffer by it in this World ; but an erroneous, doubting, scrupulous Conscience, is improperly called Conscience, it being nothing else but our mistaken Opinion of Things, and the wavering uncertainty of our Minds, which cannot determine on which side the Truth lies.

But

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Rom. 14.23. *he that doubteth, is damned if he eat; for what-ever is not of Faith, is Sin.* But notwithstanding this, this distinction between Mens Consciences, and private Opinions, between their Judgments, directed and governed by the Laws of God, or by other arbitrary and uncertain Measures, is of very great use to direct our practice.

For first, this should make us religiously careful not to pretend Conscience, that is, a Divine Authority, where we can produce no Divine Law commanding or forbidding those things, which we pretend to do, or not to do, under the Obligations of Conscience. The pretence of Conscience is, that we dare not displease God, and therefore chuse rather to displease Men: but to pretend a Divine Command and Authority when we have none, is like prophesying falsely in the Name of God, and

and entitling the Divine Majesty to all our Dreams and Fancies; it is to make new Laws which God never made, and to set up a new Church, and new Religion in his Name. And if we consider what dreadful Woes and Curses are denounced against those who prophesy falsely in the Name of God, it should make us all tremble to pretend a Divine Command, without Divine Authority. This we may see in the Prophet *Jeremiah*, *Then the Lord said unto me, The Prophets prophesy Lies* *Jer. 14.14.* *in my Name, and I sent them not,* *neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them; they prophesy to you a false Vision and Divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their Heart.* *I have heard what the Prophets said, that* *Jer. 23. prophesy lies in my Name, saying, I have* *25.26. dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the Heart of the Prophets that prophesy Lies?* *Yea, they are Prophets of the deceit of their own Hearts.* *There-* *V. 30,31. fore behold, I am against the Prophets,* *said the Lord, that steal my words every one from his Neighbour.* *Behold, I am against the Prophets, said the Lord, that use their Tongues, and say, He saith.* *Behold, I am against them that prophesy* *false*


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false Dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my People to err by their Lies, and by their lightness, yet I sent them not, nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this People at all, saith the Lord. Now though we understand prophesying here of foretelling future Events in God's Name, without any Revelation or Authority from him; yet to pretend that God has commanded or forbidden any thing which he has not, is not a less Crime than to prophesy Dreams, and the deceit of our Hearts: for the mischief which these false Prophesies did, consisted in that ill influence they had upon Mens Lives, that they hindred their Repentance, and encouraged them in their licentious or idolatrous practices; and therefore to preach up new Laws in God's Name, is as great an Evil as it is to prophesy falsely in his Name; and therefore no Man must pretend Conscience any further, than the express Commands and Prohibitions of the Scripture. To say that any thing is unlawful to be done which God has not forbid, or that it is unlawful to do any things in Matters of Worship which God has not commanded, is to prophesy falsely

Falsely in God's Name, when they can shew no such Law extant in the whole Bible.

You pretend Conscience; it may be against hearing a form of Prayer, or receiving the Sacrament kneeling, or being present when the Minister uses a Surplice in Divine Administrations. Consider now, whether you do not falsely pretend a Divine Authority, when you have none; shew me, where God has forbid the use of a form of Prayer, or a Surplice; or kneeling at the Lord's Supper, or the Cross in Baptism: If you think it sufficient that these are not commanded, shew me but that Law; That nothing must be done in the Worship of God but what he has commanded; and if you can do neither, as I am sure you can't, then consider what an impious thing it is, to say, *This saith the Lord;* when he hath not said it? to make new Laws, and bind them upon your own Consciences, and impose them upon other Men, by your own private Authority, which is a much heavier imposition, than the observation of some few innocent and indifferent Rites and Ceremonies:

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Those who understand their Christian Liberty, in the use of indifferent Things, and therefore comply with all wholiome Constitutions of the Church, in obedience to their Civil and Ecclesiastical Governors, do not usurp upon God's Authority, but obey Divine Laws as Divine, and Humane Laws as Humane ; but to pretend Conscience for disobeying our Governors in indifferent things, is to teach for Doctrines the Commandments of Men, to make that a Divine Law which God never made so, *viz.* *That we must do nothing in Religion which God hath not commanded, though it be commanded by an lawful Superior.*

Secondly ; I observe further, That the meer pretence of Conscience, is not a sufficient justification of any Action, unless we can produce a Divine Law, as the Rule of our Consciences. It is not Conscience, when we mean no more by it, than our private Judgment and Opinions of Things, but the Law of God which is the Rule of our Actions. There never have been worse Actions done, than have been done out of a pretence of Conscience ; and he must

must be a very uncharitable Man, who believes that there never was a conscientious Pagan, Papist, or Mahometan; and if to act according to our Consciences, that is, our Belief and Perswasion, be sufficient to acquit us at God's Tribunal, this must necessarily make all Religions indifferent; for then an honest Pagan, Papist, or Turk, who lives according to his own Perswasion, is as acceptable to God, as the most hearty and sincere Protestant; then the Jews were very godly and devout Men, when in Zeal for their Law they crucified Christ, and persecuted his Apostles, as believing that they did God good Service; and therefore we must not content our selves, if we act according to our Belief; but we must be careful to believe aright, for if we follow the guidance of a blind and ignorant Conscience, we shall wander and go astray to the infinite danger of our Souls; as our Saviour tells us, That *If the Blind lead the Blind, they shall both fall into the Ditch.* These blind Men are such as have blind Consciences, that is, are ignorant of their Duty; but yet may very sincerely follow their own Consciences, and very safely too,

PART I. if Conscience, right or wrong, were a secure Guide.

Thirdly ; I observe further, That we ought not to doubt and scruple any thing which is not forbid by a Divine Law. The Law of God is the Rule of our Consciences ; and therefore to the Law, and to the Testimony, and if our Consciences do not speak according to them, it is, because there is no Light in them. Some Men look upon it as a sign of great tenderness of Conscience to be doubtful and scrupulous, and value themselves more by their Scruples, than other Men do by the most clear and distinct Knowledge, and therefore are afraid of being delivered from their Scruples, and use great Art and Industry to ensnare and entangle themselves ; but I confess, I shall never envy any Man this Attainment, no more than I do a purblind Eye, which sees very imperfectly, and therefore gropes for its way with great caution and fear.

Now all Men agree, that when we have any unnecessary Doubts and Scruples, though we must not act with such a scrupulous Conscience, yet we ought

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to lay our Scruples aside: But then the great Question is, How we should do it? unless Men can have Scruples, and lay them aside again when they please: but this seems to be a plain and easy way to satisfy our Consciences, that since the Law of God is their Rule, we must never scruple the lawfulness of any thing, which is not either expressly forbid by God, or by such evident and necessary consequence, as every honest Man may discern without using any great skill and subtilty. While Men do not judg of things by the Law of God, but by arbitrary Rules of their own inventing, or by Fancy and Humour, Prejudice or Interest, they may like or dislike just what they please, and call it Conscience when they have done; but the observing this one Rule, would soon cure all Fanaticism, and restore the Church to Peace and Unity.

To make the Scripture a perfect Rule, not only of Faith and Manners, and all the essential parts of Worship, (which we readily grant and prove against the Church of *Rome*) but also of all external Circumstances, Rites and Ceremonies, when we find no such

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thing said in Scripture, nor any such entire and perfect Form of Discipline and Worship prescribed in it, is the true cause of all our Divisions, and fills peoples heads with endless and infinite Scruples ; but to make the Commands and Prohibitions of Scripture, the Rule of our Consciences, and the certain measure and standard of what is lawful and unlawful, so as neither to condemn nor scruple what is not forbid in Scripture, would infallibly heal our Breaches, and restore us to Peace with our selves, and with one another.

Fourthly ; I observe further, That neither a mistaken nor a scrupulous Conscience, can justify our Disobedience to the Commands of our Superiors. We may indeed oppose the Authority of God, against any humane Power ; a Conscience informed and governed by the Divine Laws will not, cannot, ought not to stoop to the greatest Prince, who commands any thing contrary to God's Law, because the Power and Authority of God is most sacred and venerable, absolute and supreme ; but an erroneous, mistaken, doubt-

doubting, scrupulous Conscience ; in a word, a Conscience which is not governed by the Laws of God, is not armed with his Authority neither, and therefore cannot justify our Disobedience to Princes ; for it is only the Opinion of a private Man, and therefore cannot justify Disobedience to publick Authority.

Which shews us how necessary it is to inform our Consciences aright, and to keep close to our Rule, not to neglect any thing which God has commanded, nor to do any thing which he has forbid ; and where God has not determined us by his Authority, in those things which he has neither commanded nor forbid, to submit our selves to our lawful Superiors ; for nothing but the Authority of God will justify our Disobedience to Humane Authority, and where we cannot pretend God's Authority, as we cannot in those things which are left undetermined, it is a sin to disobey our Rulers, though they be but Men.

I shall not determine that Question now, Whether a Man, who is under some Doubts and Scruples, ought not to obey his Governors, notwithstanding

ing those Scruples, because he that doubts, is only supposed not to be satisfied about the evil of the thing commanded, but in the mean time he is certain that it is his Duty to obey his Superiors; and therefore not being sure that he shall sin in obeying (because he is not sure that what they command is sinful) and being sure, that he shall sin in disobeying them, (if their Commands be lawful) and being withal under a necessity of doing one or t'other, whether he ought not in prudence to take the surest side, that is, to waive his Scruples, and obey his Prince?

I shall at present only observe this one thing, without drawing any peremptory conclusion from it; That Obedience to our Superiors is a plain and express Law, and so the proper Rule of Conscience; and therefore if what our Prince commands us, be not forbid by as plain and express a Law as that is which commands our Obedience, we seem to oppose our private and uncertain Opinions, against the express Authority of God, and chuse rather to follow our Consciences where they are not evidently directed by a Divine Law, than where they are.

are. No Humane Authority must be set up against the Authority of God, but a Divine Authority, that is, a Divine Law, is a more certain Rule than private Opinion.

The sum of all is this, That no Man acts out of true Principles of Conscience, but he who keeps his Eye fixed upon his Rule; who directs and governs his Conscience by the Law of God; other Men live by their private Humours and Fancies, are turned aside by every novel and groundless Conceit: And though they may be pleased to call this Conscience, yet it will not excuse them from the guilt of Schism, if they divide the Church, and rend themselves from the Body of Christ: Conscience will never justify us, but when we obey and observe our Rule.

Secondly; Another Question I would propose to these Men, is, Whether they ever seriously consider the hainous nature of Schism? Now there is great reason to ask this Question, if we observe with what little consideration most Men engage themselves in it, how wantonly they forsake the Communion of the Church, as if it were per-



perfectly indifferent whether they come to Church, or go to a Conventicle; as if it were no more, than to leave their own Parish Church and go to another, where there is a Preacher whom they like better.

It is plain, that such Men as these never understood what Christian Unity is, nor ever considered what the danger of Schism is; that this, that they have not acted honestly and sincerely in a Matter of such vast importance.

The Christian Church is represented in Scripture as one Body, united to Christ, who is the Head of his Church, and the Saviour of the Body; This St. Paul makes a powerful Argument to Unity, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace; there is one Body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your Calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. What does this Bond of Peace signify, but the external Communion of the Christian Church, when Christians live together as Members of the same Body, and united to each other, as the Members of the Natural Body are, by Nerves and Si-

Ephes. 4.
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news? For Christians are called one Body; with respect to their external Communion, which is represented in the Lord's Supper, by their eating of one Bread; as St. Paul argues, *The Bread which we break, is it not the Communion of the Body of Christ?* For we being many, are one Bread, and one Body; for we are all partakers of that one Bread. So that we become one Body by external and visible Communion, by being united into one Religious Society for the Worship of God, and our mutual edification. *But speaking the Truth in love, may grow up to him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ;* From whom the whole Body fitly joined together, by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the Ephes. 4.10. measure of every part, maketh increase of the Body to the edifying of it self in love. The Christian Church is a House, and Building, and Temple of God; but this House and Building is not raised with loose and incoherent Stones, but all the Building fitly framed together, Ephes.2.22. growth into a Holy Temple in the Lord. All those Expressions, whereby the Scripture describes the Unity of the Christian Church, signify one Communion,

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Joh. 17.
20, 21.

nion, as our Saviour prays for his Disciples, that *they all may be One*; and for all those who in after Ages should believe on him; *That they all may be One, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the World may believe that thou hast sent me.* From whence it appears, that our Saviour speaks of an external and visible Union, which may be seen and taken notice of in the World. How frequent are the Exhortations to Christian Love and Unity? *Fulfil ye my Joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same Love, being of one accord, and of one mind.* This was that new Commandment which Christ gave to his Disciples, as the badge of their Discipleship.

Phil. 2. 2.

A new Commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you; hereby shall all Men know that ye are my Disciples, if ye have love one to another. And wherein this mutual Love expressed it self, we learn from the first Pattern of the Christian Church.

Joh. 13.

34, 35.

And they continued steadfast in the Apostles Doctrine and Fellowship, and in breaking of Bread, and of Prayers; that is, in all the Parts and Offices of Christian Communion; this

Acts 2. 42.

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is essential to Christian Love, to continue in the Communion and Fellowship of the same Body, that there may be no Schism in the Body, but all firmly united by the common Bonds of Love and Peace: and therefore in St. John's Time, those Hereticks who separated themselves into distinct Conventicles, are said to go out from among them; *They went out from us, 1 Joh. 2. 13;* because they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us, (that is, in our Fellowship and Communion) but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. Now if this Argument be good, it necessarily infers that indispensable Obligation which lies upon all Christians, who will be owned for Members of that one Body of Christ, to live in Communion with each other.

The Unity of Mind and Spirit, of Love and Affection, and the Unity of the same Faith, is necessary to Christian Union; but this Union is made external and visible by Christian Communion; and our daily experience tells us, how impossible it is for Men to love like Brethren, like Members of the same

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same Body, who are not of the same Body, but divide themselves into distinct and separate Churches, under different Laws, Government, and Discipline.

Now if Christian Love and Union be so necessary a Duty of Christianity, consider what the Evil of Schism is which rends the seamless Coat of Christ, and divides his Church into so many little Parties and Factions.

Christ has but one Body, and those who separate from the Body of Christ are no longer of his Body; and the Ancient Christians did believe Schismatics to separate Men from Christ, and to put them out of a state of Salvation. It was an acknowledged Principle among them, That there was no Salvation out of the Church, and that Schismatics were out of the Church.

I dare not judge any Man's final State, as not knowing what merciful allowances a merciful and compassionate Lord may make; for the Errors and Mistakes, Frowardness and Peevishness of his Disciples; but yet I wish that all Persons concerned, would seriously consider, that St. Paul makes all other Attainments whatsoever of no value without Charity; that this is that Divine

wine Principle which unites us to God, and to one another; that he makes Schism a Work of the Flesh, and when he reproves the *Corinthians* for that Schism which was among them, though it was not broke out into actual Separation, yet he calls them Carnal; *For are ye not carnal? for whereas there is Cor. 3, 1
is among you envying, and strife, and 3, 4
divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk
as Men?* So far is Separation from being an Argument of more perfect and excellent Christians, that it is a Work of the Flesh, and the Symptom of a Carnal Mind.

But I do not intend to discourse this fully; but it is a certain Argument, that that Man does understand nothing of Christian Religion, who makes light of Schism, without so much as considering what guilt he involves himself in; nothing could be a more effectual Cure of Schism, than a serious consideration of the evil and danger of it. That pain we feel in tearing one Member from another, and that mischief the whole Body suffers by it, which becomes maimed and imperfect by the want of the least and most inconsiderable Member, makes us careful to

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to preserve our natural Bodies from any Rent or Schism; and were we living Members of the Mystical Body of Christ, had we that natural love, sympathy, and fellow-feeling for each other, as the Members of the natural Body have, we should find Schism and Separation as painful to us, as it is to part with one of our Members, and be as sensible of the want of Christian Communion, and the discharge of these mutual Offices of Charity, exhorting, admonishing, reproving, comforting, praying for, and with each other, (which cannot be performed in a state of Separation) as we are of the want of the service of any Member which we have lost: It is a certain sign, that Member does not belong to the Body, which feels not the pain of such Convulsions and Schisms.

Thirdly; Another Question I would ask these Men, is, Whether they do in their Consciences believe, that Communion with our Parish Churches is unlawful? And there is some reason to ask this; for it is easily observed, that there are a great many, who are Christians at large, and as occasion serves,

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can either go to Church, or to Conventicle. Now if they make Conscience of auy thing, we may conclude, that when they come to Church, they do not think it a sin so to do ; or that there is any thing, so unlawful in our Worship, as is sufficient to justify a Separation : for if they may lawfully communicate with us once, they may do so always by the same Reason ; from whence it follows, that there can be no necessity of Separation, and then Separation must be a Sin.

Some indeed say, That it is a sufficient reason to separate, even from a True Church, and a lawful Communion; to join in fellowship with a purer Church; and to enjoy purer Ordinances. But I would desire such Men to consider ;

First ; That this Notion of a purer Church, and purer Ordinances, varies with every Man's fancy, as having no Foundation in Scripture, Reason, or Antiquity, when you distinguish a purer Church from a pure Church. I would desire to know, what greater degree of purity they find in a Presbyterian

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terian or Independent Conventicle, than in our Parochial Churches. If this Purity consists in Doctrine, Government, or Worship; that Doctrine and Government which is most Ancient, and most Apostolical, is pure than some novel and upstart Opinions, Church Forms and Models; and that Worship which retains all the Institutions of Christ, and administers them with the greatest order and decency, and most to Christian Edification, is as pure a Worship as that which is slovenly and unbecoming the gravity and solemnity of Divine Worship: That Church wherein Christians may enjoy all the means and conveyances of Grace, without any corrupt Mirtures to spoil their Virtue and Efficacy, is a pure Church, such a Church wherein a Christian may communicate, without doing any injury to his Soul, is a pure Church, and has all the degrees of purity, which is necessary to External Communion.

If by a purer Communion, they mean only the Communion of better Men, and of greater Saints, they ought to consider, that it is impossible to exclude Hypocrites out of any Church, unless

unless they pretend to a Gift of discerning Spirits; nor is it fit they should be excluded, while they are not openly scandalous; for to shut such Men out of the Church, deprives them of the Means of Grace, and all hopes of proving better Men.

And I hope Christian Communion is not confined to any single Congregation, but every good Christian, who lives in the Communiaon of the Church, enjoys the Communion of Saints in all the World, is a Member of the same Body, which consists of all the true Disciples of Christ.

Nay, I would desire them to consider, that the Glory of the Christian Communion is this, That our Fellowship ^{1 John 1. 3.} is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, with the glorious and triumphant Church in Heaven, as well as with the Church Militant on Earth.

But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the City of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of Angels; to the general Assembly, and Church of the First Born, which are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the Spirits of Just Men made perfect; and to Jesus the

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Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the Blood of Abel. This is the Church-Fellowship which those enjoy, who live in Communion with the Universal Church, and which Schismaticks have no right to ; and those who think to meet with better Company at a Conventicle, let them take it.

But must not the Christian Church consist of all ranks and degrees of Christians, as our natural Body does of several sorts of Members of different honour and worth ? and is it fitting for strong and well-grown Christians to separate from the weak and imperfect, as if the eye should separate from the Body, as despising the Communion of the Foot ; and yet if St. Paul says true, that Schism is a work of the Flesh, and the sign of carnal Men ; we have no reason to look for the best Christians in Schismatical Churches.

But, secondly, it was never till of late days thought lawful to separate from a lawful Communion ; though as the state of the Church in this World is, it were subject to some defects ; and therefore the *Brownists*, who separated

not to be forsaken.

rated from the Church of *England*, pretended that her Worship and Government was Unlawful, Idolatrous, and Antichristian; and the old Nonconformists, who thought they could not conform as Ministers, yet very religiously conformed as Lay-men, both in Prayers and Sacraments, condemned this Schism, and proved, that Communion with the Church of *England* was lawful, and therefore Separation was sinful; and I dare challenge any Man to shew me, from the first beginnings of Christianity, that ever it was thought lawful to separate from a Church, where we might communicate without sin.

And, thirdly, let these Men consider, that this Notion of separating from a lawful Communion, for a purer Communion, lays the foundation of eternal Schisms; for there being no certain rule for the degrees of this Purity, every Man, according to his own fancy, may refine for ever.

Fourthly; If they do indeed think the Communion of the Church of *England* to be unlawful and sinful, I would desire them to enquire, how they came at first to think so? for this

PART I. is a very material Enquiry, if Men desire to know their honesty and sincerity in this Matter? for if Men are at first by their own fault enmired in an Error, and drawn into Schism, how firmly soever afterwards they believe their Separation to be lawful and necessary, it will not excuse them.

It is impossible to know all the several ways whereby Men come at first to be engaged in Schism; but I shall take notice of some few which seem to be most common: Such are these; 1. Education. 2. Lightness and giddiness of Mind. 3. Some distaste at Publick Affairs. 4. Some quarrel with the Ministers of Religion. 5. Interest, or the Perswasion of Friends.

1. Education; when Men have been nursed up in Schism from their infancy, and have been taught to despise the Common Prayer before they could read, and to call the Church Antichrist, and the Ministers of it *Bad's Priests*, as soon as they could speak.

Now it must be acknowledged, that this is the most pitiable case, and the fairest Excuse and Apology that can be made for any Man; for we all know,

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what the power of Education is, and how hard it is to deliver our Minds from the first Impressions of Childhood and Youth ; but yet this will not excuse a Man, when he has attained to Years of discretion, and has opportunities of being better informed, for if it would, *Pagans*, *Mahometans*, and *Papists*, who labour under the same prejudices of Education, have the same excuse : We must offer up to God a reasonable Service, and that requires the exercise of our Reason in the choice of our Religion, as well as in the discharge of Religious Duties. Nay, *Papists*, *Mahometans*, and *Pagans*, have a better excuse upon this account, than our Dissenters, because their Prejudices may reasonably be thought more invincible, as will appear, if we briefly consider three or four things.

First, That theirs is the Religion of their Country, which they have been in quiet possession of for many Age ; and thus that reverence they pay to the wisdom and memory of their Ancestors, adds to the prejudices of their Education ; whereas every one knows that this present Schism, and the pre-

How far Education

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tences whereon it is founded, are but late Innovations, a Novelty which is not yet grey-headed : And though Antiquity in it self confidered, is no Argument for an ancient Error, nor Novelty, any reasonable exception against Truth, if there are any new Discoveries to be made in this last Age of the World ; yet we all know, when we speak only of the Power of Prejudice, that it is a harder thing to perswade Men to part with such Doctrines, Customs, Usages, Religions which they have received from their Ancestors for many Generations, than to part with some novel Invention, whose very Novelty will not admit of any strong and lasting Prejudice. Thus we know, the Antiquity of the *Pagan Religion*, which pleaded the Prescription of unknown Ages, made it extreamly difficult to perswade Men to renounce their Country Gods, and to embrace Christianity ; and that Objection of Novelty, though it were false, was yet a great hindrance to the reception of the Gospel ; which I alleadg to shew, that a long and immemorial Prescription, is a more powerful Prejudice than some few Years Education ; and therefore if the
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Prejudices of Education be thought sufficient to justify our Dissenters; it is a much better Justification of Pagans and Papists in foreign Countries.

For, 2ly, it may cause a reasonable suspicion in honest Dissenters, sufficient to put them upon a new search and enquiry, when they remember that the King and the Church of *England* fell together; that those, who altered the Government of the Church, pulled down Monarchy, and transformed themselves into as many different shapes and forms in the State, as they set up new Models of Discipline and Government in the Church; which is an Argument, that they were not the most infallible Men, nor acted by the best Principles that ever were.

The Church of *England*, as established by Law, has had possession in this Nation ever since the Reformation; and a few Years interruption, in time of Rebellion and great Confusion, is not sufficient to dispossess it; and therefore all Men ought to have laid aside their Prejudices, and to have returned to the Communion of the Church, as well as to their Loyalty to their Prince, unless they could shew some

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some better Reasons against it, than the Prejudices of Education, which can be no just excuse at this day; for he is a very unreasonable Man who shall desire any more than twenty Years, to wear off the Prejudices of twenty Years Education.

Especially when we consider, That no other Religion, or form of Church Government, ever had a legal possession of this Nation, during the Anarchy and Internecine of Church and State. Neither Presbytery, Independency, nor Anabaptism, were settled by Law, but they shuffled as well as they could, and used their utmost skill to establish themselves by the numbers and power of their several Parties, and sometimes one prevailed, and, sometimes another; and instead of one National Church, we had twenty National Schisms, or but one Church.

Which, truly, plainly shews, That the Prejudices of Education can be no good Plea in this Case; for it is impossible the Prejudices of Education should be strong and invincible, where there is no one fixed Church, nor one face of Religion in a Nation, but several Churches

Churches quarrelling and contending with each other.

Those who are brought up in a Country where the People never heard but of one Religion, as it is in Spain, or at least never heard of any other, but under such dismal frightful Characters, as may raise their indignation and their hatred of such Monsters, it is no wonder, I say, if such Men's Prejudices be very strong, and almost invincible: But when Men see Religion in so many shapes, and converse with Men of different Persuasions, and see that they are not Monsters, but Men like themselves; this rather inclines them to uncertainty and Scepticism to Religion, to be sure it is not apt to possess them with any fixt and unalterable Prejudices for or against any Religion. And therefore we find in this State of things, how Men make their advances from one Church to another, till at last they come to Quakerism, the end and centre of all Confusion, as being at the greatest distance from all good Order. Now when Men are in such a wandring state, like Travellers who have no certain Abode, but pass out of one Country into another, visit

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all, and stay no where, (which is the deplorable Case of many thousand poor injudicious People) it is ridiculous to plead Prejudice in their Justification.

Others engage themselves in Schism, out of lightness and giddiness of Mind: They have no fixt and stable Principles, and can never like one thing long together; or they run into Conventicles, out of a wanton curiosity, and are taken with any thing, or with nothing, as it happens; and thus by degrees contract Prejudices against that Church, whose Communion they forsook without any reason, and then believe it to be unlawful without any. The Zeal of their Preachers, and those hard words they give the Church and Churchmen, makes them believe there is some cause for it, though they know not what; and they learn by roat some popular Objections and Cavils, and when they are once engaged, lay aside all thoughts of further consideration, or a timely retreat. When Men first begin to separate, and then learn some Doubts and Scruples, and in time improve those Doubts into lasting Principles

ciples of Schism; it is no Argument of any great honesty, for an honest Man must first have very undeniable proof, that Communion is unlawful, before he can entertain the least thought of a Separation; and did Men take this course, the Schism would soon be at an end.

3. Others take distaste at the publick Administrations of Civil Government, and hence take occasion to quarrel with the Church. This seems strange, that whatever is done amiss in the State, should be made an Argument against the Church, when the Church in a Christian Kingdom is subordinate to the State, and has no power to correct the Miscarriages of Civil Government, as Civil Governors have to correct and reform the Abuses and Exorbitances of Ecclesiastical Power. But some Persons observing that close Union which is between Church and State, think it a vain thing to attempt the Crown, till they have first pulled down a Legal Church. But though these Men may talk very much against Church-Impositions, and seem as much concerned for Liberty of Conscience, as they are for the

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Liberty of the Subject, it is plain, Religion is the least thing in their thoughts; they love Schism only for the sake of Rebellion, and look upon Schismatical Conventicles, as admirable Nurseries for the Camp, though I am willing to hope they may be mistaken in it.

That this was the plain state of the Case in our late Troubles, we have been lately told in print, by one who is no great Friend to the Church of England, (though I wonder so grave and wise a Man, should thus openly betray the Secrets of his Party), who tells us, That when the War was begun by Churchmen, who had no design at first to pull down the Church, the Auxiliaries of the Parliament (the Scots) would not help them but on the terms of the Covenant; and so Church-Alterations came on, and the Parliament thought it was better have no Bishops, than such as did prevail against them. This is fair warning, and let the Church and Churchmen have a care how they oppose Rebellion any more.

Baxter's
search for
the English
Schismat.

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4. Every Miscarriage of the Bishop or Clergy, or every thing that is thought a Miscarriage, though it be none

is presently made an Occasion of Separation; as if so be the Constitution of any Church were ever the worse, because some of the Ministers of it neglect their Duty, abuse their Power, or do some things which do not please every Man's Humour. As if the miscarriages of some of the Ministers of Religion, which will sometimes happen under the best Government in the World, would justify Men in pulling down an Apostolical Church, modelled according to the Pattern of Primitive Government and Practice. And yet nothing is more common than to see Men forsake the Church and run to Conventicles, if their Minister do not in every thing comply with their Desires; if he be so ill-bred as to reprove them for their Sins, or so stiff as not to make the Laws and Constitutions of the Church yield and bend to their Humours. I suppose no Man will think, that such Persons separate out of tenderness of Conscience, who date their Separation from some little pet, quarrel, or peevish fit.

Nor, fifthly, are those very conscientious Men, who separate from the Church

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Church out of Interest ; and the persuasions and importunities of some dissenting Friends, who forsake the Church for the sake of a good Trade or a rich Wife ; or in hope of some great temporal Advantage, unless it be a sign of a tender Conscience to make Gain Godliness ; not to serve Christ, but our own Bellies. I do but just mention these things, which though I am sure are great Truths, and necessary for all Men to consider, who would try their honesty and sincerity in this Matter of Separation ; yet, I fear, the very naming of them will be very offensive to guilty Persons, who when they feel their Consciences smart, are very apt to revenge themselves upon their kind and faithful Monitors.

Fifthly ; I would desire those Persons, who plead Conscience for their Separation from the Church of England, to consider whether ever they impartially and throughly examined the Reasons of their Separation. We must be fully satisfied, that it is unlawful to communicate in such a Church, before Separation from it can be lawful ; for it is as great a sin to

desert

separate

separate from a pure Church, as it is to hold Communion with a corrupt Church; and a truly honest Man is equally careful to avoid every sin, and is as much afraid of the sin of Separation, as the sin of a corrupt and idolatrous Worship. Now when we consider how few there are that do this, and how much fewer there are that are capable of doing it; it is too plain an Argument, that most Men separate from the Church, without knowing any just cause and reason for it; as to explain this Matter a little more at large.

First; How few are there, who do examine the Reasons of their Separation? Not but that there are a great many, who furnish themselves with some popular Talk against the Bishops and Forms of Prayer, and Ceremonies &c. but to examine the reasons of Things, is very different from being able to make some slight Objections, which have been answered an hundred Times. For to examine things, is impartially to weigh and consider both parts of the Question, to avoid no difficulty, to consider what is said for and against Separation, and to hold

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the Ballance so equal, that Interest and Affection do not turn the Scales instead of Reason. Now there are two great Faults which Men are commonly guilty of in this Matter.

First, That they do not carefully examine both parts of the Question; possibly they read such Books as are writ against the Church of *England*, and to justify a Separation, but do not with the same care read those Books which prove the sinfulness of Separation, and justify the Communion of the Church of *England*. They have the Arguments for the Church of *England* only at second hand, from those who pretend to answer them, but never look into the Books themselves. And I do not wonder at this rate of examining, that Men continue Separatists after all that can be said against it; for it is rare to find any one Argument against Separation, or for Communion with our Church, fairly represented by those who pretend to answer it; who commonly pick out such things as are least material, or do not concern the main Controversy, and make a great noise and flourish with seeming to say something, which is nothing to the purpose.

purpose, but silently pass over, what they know they cannot answer.

Now whoever separates from the Church, without a thorough and impartial examination of the Reasons of it, though he should happen to be in the right, is yet guilty of Schism ; that is, though his separation in it self considered be no Schism, because there may be sufficient Reasons to justify such a Separation ; yet this being more than he can be presumed to know, he contracts the guilt of Schism : for he separates without cause, who does not know the cause of his Separation ; and he cannot know whether there be a just cause for it, who separates before he understands what is said on both sides ; as we all reckon that Man perjured, who swears nothing but what is true, but without knowing it to be true.

Secondly, Another great Fault is, That Men's Minds are commonly biased by some Interest and Affection, which weighs much more than any contrary Reasons can do ; by one means or other they fall in love with Schism and Separation, and then set their wits on Work to defend it ; and

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those must be mighty evident and powerful Demonstrations which can force Men to believe that, which they have no mind to believe.

If it be objected, That this is a Fault common to both sides. There are few Men, which side soever they are of, but are greatly inclined to favour it, and to help out a weak Argument, which is too light, with some grains of Allowance. I Answer, Possibly with most Men it may be so ; and in many cases it may be so far from being a Fault, that it is both innocent and useful, and an Argument of great Virtue and Goodness ; but the Fault and the Danger is, when the Byass stands the wroug way. As for Instance, a good Man is as strongly inclined to believe that there is a God, and to wish and hope that there is one, as a bad Man is to believe that there is no God, and to wish that there were none: Here are Inclinations and Prejudices on both sides, and yet it is virtue in a good Man, and a great sin in a bad Man ; because the one is a natural Byass and Inclination, and a sign of Virtue ; the other is against Nature, and the effect of Vice.

Thus

Thus it is here, the Laws of the Gospel, which so strictly require Christian Love and Unity as a most necessary Duty, and essential to the Christian Profession, clap a Byass upon true Christians Minds, which strongly inclines them to maintain and preserve the Peace and good Unity of the Christian Church, where they can preserve it, without any apparent injury to common Christianity ; and therefore this makes them put favourable & candid constructions upon every thing, and not make a Breach without absolute necessity ; and if they should mistake here, it is an Error on the right side : but an inclination to Separation is a false Byass, contrary to the Genius and Spirit of the Gospel, which inclines Men to Peace and Union, not to Separation, and is usually the effect of some vicious indisposition of Mind ; and if Men's Reason and Judgment be perverted by such an unchristian Inclination, it will aggravate their Guilt and Crime ; and therefore it greatly concerns all Men, who love their Souls, and would avoid the Guilt of Schism, not to be in love with Separation, which will so blind their Minds, that they shall never dis-

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cover how sinful and causless it is, nor ever be able to deliver themselves from it with all their reading and study; and it is a mighty suspicion, that Men are in love with Separation, when they are so industrious to hunt for Doubts and Scruples, and little cavilling Objections, which all the lovers of Peace and Unity, at the first Proposal, see the folly and weakness of, while such learned Rabbies are held fast in the Cobwebs of their own spinning.

Secondly; As there are great numbers of Men who separate from the Church of *England*, without an impartial Examination of the Reasons of their Separation; so there are a great many who are not capable of such Inquiries; and yet they separate also at all adventures, as others do.

A great many such Men there are, who live by their Labour, and have not time for such Studies, or it may be, cannot read, or however were never used to the Art of thinking and reasoning, and therefore may be easily mistaken in such Matters, while they rely upon their own Judgments of things; that unless we think it enough

to justify such Men, that they have been taught to call the Bishops *Anti-christian*, and our Ministers *Baal's Priests*, and our Common Prayer the *Mass-Book*, and kneeling at the Sacra-
ment *Idolatry*, and the Surplice a *Rag of the Whore of Babylon*, and such kind
of Rhetorical Figures, (which signify nothing but to make a noise, and scare ignorant People)--These Men must be acknowledged to be guilty of Schism in separating from a Church, without knowing any just reason for their Separation.

I can think but of two or three things that can be answered to this.

First, That though they are ignorant themselves, yet they are directed by wise and good Men, who understand the reason of these things.

Secondly, That this Objection does as well lie against those ignorant People, who live in Communion with the Church of *England*, as against those who separate, for they both understand the Reasons of things alike.

And thirdly, That according to this rate of arguing, such Men are not capable of chusing any Religion, but must take the Religion of their Coun-

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try, as they find it, whether it be *Paganism, Popery, or Mahometism.*

As for the first, That though they are ignorant themselves, they follow the direction of wise and good Men, who know the Reasons of these things; I would ask them this Question, Who made these wise and good Men their Guides? and how do they know that they have any reason themselves for what they do? especially since other wise and good Men say, that they have none; and such Persons are as unable to know who is in the right, as they are to determine the Controversy; and yet they do in a manner determin the Controversy, by chusing Separatists for their Guides, and rejecting those whom the Providence of God, and the Laws of the Land have apointed to be their Guides. It is plain, such Men as these want Guides to direct them, and yet in such Controversies as these, know no more whom to chuse for their Guides, then which fide to take; and therefore it is much the safest for them (because it will admit of the best excuse if they should err) to follow the direction of those Guides whom the Providence of God has provided them;

for

for if they chose Guides of their own, and heap to themselves Teachers, having illibet Ears, and thereby miscarry, they must blame themselves, but will have no Defence and Apology to make at the Tribunal of God.

As for the second, That this Objection equally lies against those ignorant People in our Communion, as against those who separate, for they both understand the reasons of things alike : The Answer is very plain, viz. there is not such a particular knowledg of things required to live in Communion with a Church, wherein we were baptized and educated, as there is to separate from it : for Separation condemns the Communion of that Church from which we separate as unlawful and sinful ; it divides the Unity of the Church, which when it is violallēs, is a very great sin ; and therefore before Men venture to separate, they ought to be very well assured, that the Communion of such a Church is sinful ; which they cannot do without a particular knowledg of those things which they condemn as sinful, and the reasons why they do so. To hold Communion with the Church wherein we

Many not capable

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we live, is always the surer side, when there are not such notorious Corruption as the meanest Man, who is honest and sincere, may understand ; for Christian Communion is a great and necessary Duty, and is not to be forsaken for every trifle ; and when the justification of Separation is spun out into such a thin and airy Controversy, as requires a very Metaphysical Brain to understand it ; honest plain Men, who are strangers to such Subtilties, should leave learned Men to wrangle among themselves, and keep close to the Communion of the Church, till they could produce some such Reasons against it, as all honest Men may understand as well as themselves ; but this will be better understood by the Answer to the next Objection ; which is this.

Thirdly, That according to this rate of arguing, such Men are not capable of chusing any Religion, but must take the Religion of their Country as they find it, whether it be *Paganism*, *Popery*, or *Mahometism* ; but this is a great Mistake, for the difference between Paganism and Christianity, between Popery and Reformed Christianity, is much more plain and discernible

cernible, and more easily understood by the most illiterate People, than the Dispute about Ceremonies, Church-Government, and Discipline ; and therefore those who are not capable of judging in these Matters, may yet be able to chuse the Christian Religion, and to reject both Paganism and Popery.

The truth of Christianity does not depend upon some nice and curious Speculations, but on the Authority of Miracles, which is so sensible an Argument, that the meanest People understand it, as well as the greatest Philosophers ; those Miracles which were wrought by Christ and his Apostles, the knowledg of which is conveyed down to us in the Writings of the New Testament, and which have been owned in all succeeding Ages of the Church till our days, do as certainly prove the truth of that Religion, which Christ and his Apostles taught, as if we had heard God speak in an audible Voice from Heaven to us ; and this is a sufficient reason to belieye whatever he has revealed, though we cannot perfectly understand all the difficulties of it.

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And when we have once embraced Christianity, we have the Writings of the Evangelists and Apostles to be the Rule of our Faith and Practice; and therefore whatever is expressly forbid in those Writings, every Man without any great skill in Controversy, knows to be unlawful, as being contrary to the revealed Will of God; and by this means the plainest Countryman may understand the difference between Popery, and Reformed Christianity; the peculiar Doctrine of the Roman Church being expressly contrary to the Doctrine and Institutions of our Saviour: for what can be more expressly contrary to the Gospel, than worshipping Images, praying to Saints and Angels, praying in an unknown Tongue, the half Communion, where the Priest drinks the Wine by himself, and gives nothing but a Wafer to the People? these things require indeed great subtlety in the Church of *Rome* to defend them; but may be understood and confuted by the plainest Man, who is no Master of Subtleties.

But the Case is quite different in the Dispute between the Church of *England*

land and Dissenters; we desire no more from them, but to shew us where any one Doctrine or Practice of the Church of *England*, is expressly condemned in Scripture, or by such a natural and easy Consequence, as every honest Man, though no Schoolman nor Philosopher, may understand it.

Where do they find that the Office of a Bishop is Antichristian, which has been continued in the Church ever since the Times of the Apostles, and whose Successors they were, if we will believe the Ancient Fathers? Where do they read, that a Form of Prayer is unlawful, when Christ himself gave a Form of Prayer to his Disciples; and the Book of *Psalms* consists of an hundred and fifty Forms of Prayers and Praises which were used in their Publick Worship? Where do they find that the Ceremonies of our Church are Idolatrous and Superstitious, when they can produce no Text of Scripture where they are forbid? unless they think, that because God has forbid worshipping Images in the second Commandment, therefore he has forbid all external Circumstances of Worship instituted for decency and Order,


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Order; which is so subtil a Consequence, as will make a very Metaphysical Head ake to discover it.

Now when there is no direct and positive proof, but Men argue wholly from some uncertain and far-fetch'd Consequences: How shall the common People, who understand none of the artificial Laws of Reasoning, judg of such Arguments?

It is possible indeed to make some terrible impressions upon their Fancies by great confidence, and an uncouth sound of words which they understand not; As, that our Ceremonies are *Symbolical*, that they are *new Sacraments*, not meer *Circumstances*, but parts of *Worship*. Now, how few are there of our *Separatists*, who understand any thing of this talk? How long time will they take to teach a Countryman, who is not Book-learn'd, what a *Symbolical Ceremony* is? or to understand how our *Ceremonies* are transformed into *Sacraments*? And yet, whoever separates upon such Accounts as these, without being able to understand the true meaning of those terrible Objections, is most certainly a Schismatick.

And

And yet there is a great deal more than is to be known, before Men can justify their Separations; for suppose they should discover some Faults in our Constitution, they must further inquire, Whether these be only some tolerable Defects and Imperfections, or whether they be Sins? Whether they Pollute the Communicants, and make Communion unlawful? Whether they be only active or passive in it? Whether, supposing the wearing of a Surplice were superstitious, all that are present at the Publick Prayers, who disown such Superstition, are yet guilty of it, and must separate to preserve their Innocence, and to declare their abomination of such Superstitions? whether the Child, who is signed with the sign of the Cross at Baptism, be ever the worse for it? or, whether the Parents, who dislike such a Ceremony, sin in submitting their Children to it, in Obedience to their Superiors? or, whether the Fault be theirs who enjoyn it? These are Matters beyond the reach of every ordinary Capacity to determine; and therefore though Separation were in it self lawful, very few Men can separate lawfully.

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106. I shall add but one thing more, with reference to the trial of these Mens honesty, Whether they separate upon true Principles of Conscience, and that is, by considering how they behave themselves towards their Government. The Conscience of any honest Man, especially when it dissents from Publick Constitutions, is a very modest and peaceable Principle; such Men think it very well if they have leave to dissent, and quietly withdraw, though they have not leave to vilify the established Religion, nor undermine publick Constitutions; and tho' they cannot obtain thus much favour, but are persecuted for a good Conscience, yet they suffer patiently, after the Example of their great Master, who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him who judgeth righteously. But a Schismaticks, whose Conscience serves an Interest, must miss of his End, if he suffers patiently; such are indeed as little in love with Sufferings as other Men, but yet they love to have some pretence or other to make a great noise and clamour about their Sufferings; as it is observed of the Schismatical

fical Donatists, that there were several Laws made against that by Theodosius the Emperor; and though none of those Laws were scarce ever executed, yet they set up a mighty cry, aggravated every little matter to cast an odium upon the Government, complained that they were injuriously handled, that their Cause was never fairly heard and determined by its intrinsic Merits, but oppressed with Force and Power.

And how parallel this Story is to the case of some in these days, I need not tell you.

I am sure there are a sort of Men who separate from our Church, and for that reason are reckon'd among the Godly Party, who take as little care to govern their Tongues or Pens (though St. James makes this the Character of a perfect Man) as any Schismatics in the World ever did; who neither express any regard to Princes, nor to Truth and Honesty, if they can but serve their Cause, by casting dirt upon the Government, or blasting the Reputation of virtuous and peaceable Men, who will not run headlong into the same Excesses with themselves. I will

O not

Cæterum et si vix illa
harum legum executio
esseret, Donatistæ tamen
invidiosæ odiosæ clamabat,
se se in iustâ vexari,
& causam suam non jure
agi, sed vi opprimi, de-
libratio. Hilt. Afric. apud
Optatum.

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not enlarge upon this Argument, left telling plain Matter of Fact, should be called Bitterness and Railing; for some Men, out of a pretence of Conscience, are guilty of such vile and lewd Practices, as they are not willing to hear of again, and think themselves slandered if they do: All that I shall say of it is only this, That a tender Conscience never teaches Men to revile and reproach their Governours; but this has been the Practice and Character of the most infamous Heretics and Schismatics ever since the beginnings of Christianity. St. Jude gives a great many hard words to some Men in his days, which I am not willing to apply to any in ours, *who despise Dominions, and speak evil of Dignities.* Yet Michael the Arch-Angel, when contending with the Devil, he disputed about the Body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing Accusation, but said, *The Lord rebuke thee.* But these speak evil of those things which they know not—*Wo unto them, for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the Error of Balaam for Reward, and perished in the gain-saying of Corez; these are spots in your Feasts of Charity, when they*

they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear; Clouds are they without Water, carried about of Winds; Trees whose Fruit withereth, without Fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the Roots; raging Waves of the Sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering Stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

I shall conclude with that admirable Rule of St. Austin, in answer to Parmenianus the Donatist.

Whoever corrects what he can by Reason and Discourse, and puts out or lays aside what is not capable of amendment, as far as this may consist with the preservation of Christian Peace and Unity, and modestly disallows, and yet upholds what cannot be parted with, without breaking the Peace of the Church, this is the true Peace-maker.

Quisquis vel quod potest arguendo corrigit, vel quod corriger non potest, salvo pacis vinculo, excludit, vel quod salvo pacis vinculo excludere non potest, aquitate improbat, firmate supportat, hic est pacificus.
St Aug. contra Epist. Par-

Containing some general Considerations, in order to remove those Prejudices, which some have entertained, against the Worship of the Church of England.

I Shall now lay down some general Principles, which may contribute towards the satisfaction of Men's Minds to remove their Prejudices against the Worship of our Church.

The things commonly objected, to drive away our People, from the Communion of our Parishes Churches, are the Government of the Church by Bishops, the unlawfulness of Forms of Prayer, the Surplice, the Cross in Baptism, and kneeling at the Sacrament, and such like; which concern the use of some indifferent and uncommanded things in Religious Worship. For we have always challenged our Adversaries, to produce any one express Law of Christ, which is contradicted and broken, by the Constitution of our Church,

Church, or the Administration of our Religious Offices ; they could never produce any yet, and I am sure never can. And if Men will abuse and scare themselves, with some fancyful Applications of Scripture, and remote and illogical Consequences, there is no help that I know of ; since it is an endless work to answer all such Cavils. For Men, who can make Objections without any just Reason, may at the same rate return answers too, without end : Therefore, the best and shortest way I can think of, is, to lay down some such general Considerations, as may satisfy all honest and teachable Minds, that though it is possible to raise Objections against any thing, yet those Objections must prove fallacious, which contradict other great and apparent Truths. And I shall reduce what I have to say, to these four general Heads.

First, The Consideration of the Nature of God.

Secondly, The Nature and Design of the Christian Religion.

Thirdly, The Example of Christ.

Fourthly, The Example of the Apostolick and Primitive Churches in the first Ages of Christianity.

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First, Let us consider the Nature of God ; for God is the Object of our Worship : And that is the best Worship, which is most suitable to his Nature : Thus our Saviour teaches us to argue, *God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.* And thus the wise Man argues, *God is in Heaven, and thou upon Earth, therefore let thy words be few.*

Jch. 4. 24.

Eccles. 5. 2.

Now, to apply this briefly to our present Case ; can any Man, who considers what God is, imagine, that he will be displeased with his Creatures, for offering up their Prayers and Thanksgivings to him in a pious and sober Form of Words ? Can God be pleased with the volubility of the Tongue, or quickness of Fancy, or variety of Invention, more than with devout Affections, than with a Soul enflamed with Divine Love, and possessed with a Reverence of the Divine Majesty, and offering up it self to him in few, grave and considerate Words ? Will a Father reject the Petitions of his Child, if as often as his Wants require, he uses the same Words, when he asks the same thing ? Does a Prince like a long extemporary Harangue, when his Subjects

jects come to beg a Boon of him, or a short and well composed Petition? The wise Man, I am sure, tells us, that few and becoming Words, are more agreeable to the Majesty of God, and more expressive of that distance which is between him and us: and therefore, are more agreeable to the nature of publick Worship, which is only an external signification of the Reverence and Devotion of the Mind.

Prayer is a necessary part of natural Religion, and was a Duty incumbent on Mankind, before God made any other revelation of his Will, than by Natural Reason; and therefore, the Reason of Mankind is a very proper Judg, in what manner we must pray to God, unless there were an express positive Law made about it. Revelation may suggest new matter for our Prayers, and direct us to pray to God in the powerful and prevailing Name of the Holy Jesus: But Words, and Postures, and other external Circumstances of Prayer, which are not expressly determined by Revelation, may be determined by humane Pſudence; for there could be no other rule for these Matters, before God revealed his Will, and

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Arguments from

PART I. if God have not altered this Rule, by a plain positive Law, it must be our Rule still, for we have no better. And therefore, we cannot imagine, that God, who is our Supream Law-giver, and discovers his Will to us, partly by the Light of Reason, and partly by Revelation, should be angry with his Creatures, for following the best Reason they have; nay, for governing themselves by the publick Reason and Authority of Church and State.

Whoever only considers the Nature of God, and the reason of things, must certainly judge it fitter to meditate before-hand, and to take Words with us, when we approach the Presence of so great a Majesty, than to venture, saying any thing which comes next: and neither the Nature of God, nor the Reason of Man, condemns any external Ceremonies for Decency and Order, and an useful signification, but have taught all Mankind to use them in all Ages of the World, and under all Forms of Religion. Whatever Religious Rites are a Dishonour and Reproach to the Divine Nature, or unbecoming the Seriousness and Solemnity of Worship, natural Reason condemns as Idolatrous or Super-

perstitious ; but whatever is no dis-
honour to God, and may be useful to
Men, is so far from being condemned,
that it is little less than the Law and
Voice of Nature.

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At least thus much we may certainly conclude, that there can be no intrinsick Evil in these things, which are neither repugnant to the Nature of God, nor the Reason of Man ; much less can it be Idolatry or Superstition, to use a Form of Prayer, and some Significant Ceremonies in Religious Worship ; for Idolatry and Superstition are not made so by positive Laws and Institutions : but to Worship a false God, or to pay such a false Worship to the true God, as is a reproach to his Nature, is Idolatry ; and Superstition consists in false Notions, repugnant to the Nature of Worship, and Men may be guilty of Superstition, in using or not using very lawful and indifferent things, when by an abused Fancy, and ill-instructed Conscience, they imprint either a religious or sinful Character upon them ; either think they shall please God, or fear they shall displease him, by doing things in their own Nature indifferent, and neither good nor bad, but according as they are used.

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And this is no small advance, towards satisfying Mens Minds, in the lawfulness of those Religious Ceremonies, which tho indifferent in their own Nature, yet are enjoyned by the Publick Authority of Church and State, for the Order, Decency, and Solemnity of Worship. For that which does not contradict the Light of Nature, which has no repugnancy to the Nature of God, nor is forbid by any plain positive Law, is the Matter of Christian Liberty, and falls under the Government and Direction of our Superiors; as will more evidently appear, if we consider,

Secondly, The Nature and Design of the Christian Religion, which I shall discourse of, only as it concerns the present Debate; and if it shall appear that Liturgies and Ceremonies do no more contradict the Nature of Christianity, than they do the Nature of God, let us all seriously consider, how we shall answer for our Disobedience to our Governors, and Separation from the Church upon such accounts as these, to our great Lord and Master, when he comes to judg the World: And here I shall do these two things;

I. Shew

1. Shew you, what that Worship is, our Saviour instituted, and how far it is from condemning the use of sober Liturgies, or decent Ceremonies. Chap. 3.

2. What there is in the Christian Religion which countenances both.

1. What the Worship is our Saviour Instituted. Christ came into the World to reform Religion, and there are four things he seemed principally to design. 1. To Spiritualize our Worship. 2. To strip it of all Types and Shadows. 3. To deliver Religion from the Incumbrances of Superstitious Observances. 4. To put a difference between the Substance, Circumstances, and Appendages of Religion, between what is Natural and Moral, and the Instrumental and External parts of Worship.

1. Our Saviour's great design was to Spiritualize our Worship. The Jewish Worship consisted in so many external Rites and Usages, in Washings, Purifications, Sacrifices, Oblations, and the like; that the generality of them placed the Worship of God, in the Homage of the external Man. If they did but worship God at the right place, and with such Sacrifices and Ceremonies

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Name

Name of Spiritual Prayer, but for what Reason I knew not ; for I suppose, few Men will pretend to pray by Inspiration; and though extemporary Prayer may more heat the Fancy, there may be more serious Devotion and Piety in using a Form ; when we have nothing to do, but to offer up our Souls to God, without setting our Inventions upon the Rack, what to say. An extemporary Prayer is as much a Form, and does as much confine and stint the Spirit in all, but the Speaker, as a Book-Prayer does : and that is a very sorry Devotion at best, which owes its Heats and Passions, not to an inward Sense of God, but to a musical Voice, earnestness in the Speaker, surprising Invention, or popular Rhetorick.

Q2. Our Saviour's design was to strip Religion of Types and Shadows : He did not indeed do this, while he was upon the Earth, because the Jewish Oeconomy was not ended, all things were not fulfilled, which were necessary to put an end to that State, till Christ died ; nor did his Apostles do it immediately, at least not in all places, but yielded to Jewish Prejudices, and indulged Jewish Converts in their Observation

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servation of Circumcision, and other Mosaical Rites: Though S. Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, would not suffer the Gentile Churches to be brought under that Bondage, which occasioned a great many Disputes with the Jews, as you may see in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians. But the abrogation of Mosaical and Typical Ceremonies, does not infer a prohibition of all significant Ceremonies in the Christian Worship; because the Reason and Nature of them were very different. The Mosaical Ceremonies were Types of Christ, who was to come in the Flesh; and therefore, to retain them in their proper Nature & Use, was to deny, that Christ was come in the Flesh: for when the Antitype appears, there is no longer any use of a Type. But now, a few innocent Ceremonies, which are neither burdensome for their number, to encumber Religion, and clog and shackle our Devotions, nor signify any thing contrary to the Nature and Design of Christianity, but add to the external Decency and Solemnity of Worship, and may withal suggest pious and devout Thoughts to us, are far enough from a Typical Nature, and therefore,

not to be abrogated.

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cannot be presumed to be shut out of the Christian Church, together with the Law of Moses. For we may observe, that the Apostles themselves, in compliance with the weakness of the believing Jews, did use a great many Mosaical Rites, only stripping them of their Typical Nature. St. Paul was a zealous opposer of Circumcision, and yet did not scruple to circumcise *Timothy*, not in token of God's Covenant with *Abraham*; but to prevent Scandal. And those Christians, who lived at *Jerusalem*, worshipped in the Temple, kept their Religious Festivals, and observed their Law: but no Christian could do this, according to the Original Institution of those Laws, for that had been to renounce Christianity: but they observed them in compliance with the custom of their Nation, and to avoid giving offence to believing Jews. And if the Apostles might lawfully observe those Jewish Customs, when they were freed from their Typical signification; it cannot be a Fault to use some such innocent Ceremonies, and Circumstances in Worship, as are no way prejudicial to the Nature of Christianity. If the belief of Christianity, made the Ob-

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Observation of those Jewish Ceremonies Innocent, which in their own Nature, and Original Institution, are inconsistent with Christianity; as signifying that Christ was not yet come. How much more innocent is it to worship God in a white Garment; to kneel at the Sacrament, and bend our Knee to our Lord, at whose Table we eat, and to sign our Children with the Sign of the Cross, in honour of our crucified Lord, and as a visible Profession of a suffering Religion.

3. Our Saviour rejects all Superstitious Observances, which were not any part of Religious Worship, and yet were thought to have an extraordinary Sacredness and Religion in them; such as he calls the *Traditions of their Elders*, and charges them with teaching for *Doctrines the Commandments of Men*, such as washing Cups, Platters, and Hands before Dinner; this, *Touch not, taste not, handle not*, are by St. Paul called the *Doctrines and Commandments of Men*; which refer to their abstaining from certain sorts of Meats, and the like. So that these Doctrines and Commandments of Men, which Christ flings out

Col. 2. 21.

part of his Religion, were not any Ceremonies or Circumstances of Worship, but some Customs they took up with a great Opinion of their Religion, and Merit: As the Papists have great numbers of them, such as Pilgrimages, and Penances, &c. And St. Paul tells us with respect to such Customs as these, *That the Kingdom of God is not Meat Rom. 14:17; and Drink, but Righteousness and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost:* that is, that Christian Religion does not consist in such sorry things, as eating or not eating such and such Meats, but Christ expects from us true and sincere piety, as the only thing that can recommend us to God. Such Superstitious Customs as these, are very different from the Circumstances and Ceremonies of Religious Worship, unless we think it the same thing, to hope to merit Heaven by going a Pilgrimage, by professing Poverty, Celibacy, and blind Obedience, by abstaining from Flesh in Lent, and such kind of vain Superstitions; as it is to wear a Surplice in the time of Divine Worship, or to receive the Lord's Supper upon our Knees, as an external Expression of Devotion, not as meritorious Superstitions.

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The Ceremonies of our Church have been often declaimed against, under the Notion of *the Doctrines and Traditions of Men*; but it is plain, that neither our Saviour, nor St. Paul, meant any thing like them; for they do not speak of any Circumstances or Appendages of Religious Worship, but of such arbitrary Superstitions, as they turned into formal Acts of Religion.

The fourth does not much concern our present Argument, the difference Christ put between the Substantial, and the Instrumental parts of Worship, any otherwise than to mind us, that we must not look upon any Ceremonies as parts of Worship, but a decent manner of performing it: That our acceptance with God depends upon nothing, that is merely external, but on the Devotion of the Heart and Soul, expressed in such becoming Words and Behaviour, as may make it visible and exemplary to others; and this is exactly the Doctrine of our Church. And if any Men think, that such external Expressions of Honour will please God, without the Worship of the Mind and Spirit; they must answer for themselves, for she owns no such Principles, but takes

takes care to instruct her Children better.

And methinks, this should be no small satisfaction to Mens Minds, that the established Worship of our Church, has nothing contrary to the nature and design of Christianity ; from whence it follows, that Men may be very good Christians, while they live in Communion with our Churc^h ; and then I doubt, they cannot be very good Christians when they forsake it : for nothing but an apparent and manifest danger of sin, can justify such a Separation.

2. But let us now further consider, how the Worship of our Churc^h is justified by the Principles of Christianity. We do not pretend that there is an express command to pray always by a Form, or to institute and appoint significant Ceremonies, in the Worship of God ; but there is enough in the Gospel of our Saviour to justify such Practices : as briefly, to point to some few things ;

1. Our Saviour himself taught his Disciples to pray by a Form, *Our Father which art in Heaven*, &c. And if you will allow that it was lawful for them to pray in these words, though

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you should suppose, that they were not always bound to use it, it plainly proves, that the Christian Religion does not forbid praying by a Form; for if it be lawful to pray by a Form, even of Divine Institution, then a Form, as a Form, cannot be unlawful.

2. Our Saviour has no where prescribed the particular Circumstances of Religious Worship, and yet no Religious Action can be performed without some Circumstances or other; he has commanded us to pray to God in his Name, to commemorate his Death and Passion in his last Supper, and has commanded his Apostles to baptize all Nations *in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*: But how oft we must pray, and celebrate this Heavenly Feast, in what Place, in what Posture, in what Time, he has not told us. He has prescribed the Form of words in Baptism, but not any one Circumstance; and yet it is certain, there must be some Circumstances for every Action, for the more decent performance, and greater solemnity of such mysterious Rites; and therefore we may well conclude, that our Saviour left all such to the order

order and direction of his Apostles and their Successors in all Ages, as may tend most to the preservation of good Order, and the edification of the Church. For we must consider the difference between the Law and the Gospel. Under the Law, the Church was in an Infant State, like an Heir Gal. 4. 1, 2, under Age, which is under Tutors and Governors, and therefore every part of that Typical Temple-worship, was exactly framed according to the Pattern in the Mount.

But the Christian Church is arrived to a full Age, and set at liberty by Christ from the Yoke of Bondage, and Gal. 5. 1, therefore is not under servile restraints, but has the Government of its own Actions, according to the general Rules and Prescriptions of the Gospel. Not that every particular Christian is at liberty to worship God as he pleases, which could bring nothing but Confusion and disorder into the Church, but is to be under the Government and direction of his Spiritual Guides and Pastors, while they keep within the General Rules of the Gospel : But the Christian Church enjoys that Liberty

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which the Jewish Church had not, that they can institute and appoint, change and alter the external Circumstances of Worship, as the Necessities of the Church, and the Edification of Christians require.

So much are those Men mistaken, who argue from *Moses* to Christ, that Christ is as faithful at least as *Moses* was; and therefore since *Moses* gave them an exact Platform of Worship, from which they must not vary in the least *punctilio*, they conclude, that Christ hath done so too, though they cannot shew where he has done it; that he has prescribed such an exact Form of Government, Discipline, and Worship in the Church, as perpetually obliges all Christians; whereas we must observe, that there was no Christian Church formed in our Saviour's Days; but he communicated with his Disciples in the Jewish Church while he lived, and gave them Authority and Power to form Churches after his Resurrection. But we must observe the difference the Apostle makes between *Moses* and Christ, *that one was faithful as a Servant, the other*

Heb. 3.5.

other as a Son. Now a Servant must exactly follow his Rules and Orders; but a Son governs his own House with greater freedom: and Moses being a Servant, signifies also the servile State of that People whom he governed, that they were in Bondage under the Rudiments of this World, and had their task exactly set them; but Christ, who is the Son and Heir, and Lord of all, has made us Sons and Freemen too; and therefore does not give such particular Laws about every little Circumstance, but expects from us a more manly and generous Obedience.

And indeed there was great reason why the Jewish Worship should be exactly prescribed by God, because it was typical of Christ, and the state of the Gospel; it was a visible Prophecy of things to come, and therefore could be drawn by no other hand, but that which was guided by an Omniscient Eye; whence the Apostle observes, that Moses was faithful as a Servant, for *a Testimony of those things which were to be spoken after.* But in other Matters the Jews themselves were not under such confinement; their Synagogue-

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Worship, where they performed the Duties of Natural Religion, was ordered by their own prudence and directions : They ordered the baptizing of Proselytes, without any command or direction in their Law for it ; which our Saviour made the Sacrament of our Admission into his Church ; and that Bread and Wine, which by the same Authority was added to the Paschal Supper, was consecrated by our Saviour as a Festival Commemoration of his broken Body, and his Blood shed for us ; and therefore we have little reason to doubt, whether the Christian Church has the same liberty which the Jewish Synagogue had, to appoint such Circumstances and Ceremonies as are most suitable to the several parts of Religious Worship.

3. The Apostles, who were authorized by our Saviour to make Disciples, and to gather them into Church-Communion, give general Rules for Order and Decency, and enjoyn Obedience to our Spiritual Guides ; *Let all things be done decently and in order ; and, let all things be done to edifying ;* which is even the Rule of the Apostolical

lical Power, which God hath given us for edification, and not for destruction. Now general Rules leave Men at liberty as to particular Instances, because a general Rule may be complied with different ways, which are supposed to be in his choice who receives such a Rule.

Thus we are commanded to obey our Spiritual Guides : *Obey them who have the Rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your Souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief :* Which when there is no fixt and settled Rule of Government, supposes that many things are left to the prudence and discretion of the Governours ; the natural Inference from which is, that though there be no express command for a Form of Prayers, or significant Ceremonies ; yet when they are ordered and established by the united Wisdom and Authority of Church and State, it is the Duty of every Christian, willingly and chearfully, to comply with them, while they agree with the general Rules of Gospel-Worship.

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3. Let us now consider the Example of our Saviour while he conversed on the Earth, which is a most admirable Pattern for all Christians to follow.

Now I observe, that though our Saviour lived in a very degenerate Age of the Jewish Church, when their Priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, by those Characters which he himself gives of them, appear to be very vile Persons; yet he lived in the Communion of the Jewish Church; though he were the great Reformer of Religion, yet the time of the Jewish Church not being yet expired, he formed no new Churches, but observed their Publick Assemblies of Worship, preached in their Temple, and in their Synagogues, and observed all their Religious Festivals as punctually as any of themselves: which Consideration ought to give some check to those Men, who forsake the Communion of the Church, under pretence that there are bad Men in it.

Thus our Saviour conformed to all those laudable and innocent Customs of the Jewish Church, which were of humane Institution, and were not founded

the Example of Christ.

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Joh. 10.22

1 Macab. 4.

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founded on the Authority of a Divine Law. He celebrated the Feast of Dedication, which was appointed by *Judas Maccabæus* and his Brethren, and the Children of *Israel*, to be observed annually for eight days, in remembrance of the cleansing of the Temple from the prophanation of *Antiochus*, ^{1 Macab. 4.} and the regaining their liberty of publick Worship. This Feast, though it were of Humane Institution, our Saviour nowhere reprobates, but graces and countenances the Solemnity with his own Presence. Thus he conformed to the Synagogue-Worship, which was all of humane Order and Appointment, as you heard before.

Thus he who so severely reproved the superstitious abuse even of Divine Institutions, who despised their Sacrifices, and Oblations, and all their external and solemn Hypocrisies, their broad Phylacteries, and their frequent and religious Purifications, when they placed their Religion in the bare doing those things, without attending to the end for which they were commanded; does both practise and allow those humane Institutions, which served a good end



end in Religion; which is a plain Argument that our Saviour did not think it such a prophanation of Religion, to appoint any Circumstances of Religious Worship, not commanded by God; but that all external Things must be measured by their End and Use. Those are innocent and laudable Customs which serve a good End, either help the Devotion of the Worshipper, or make the Worship more grave and solemn, provided it be not in forbidden Instances,

4. The practice of the Apostles, and the first and best Churches, are a great vindication of the Constitution and Worship of the Church of England; Where we have not a plain and express Rule, Examples, which are great and good Ones, have the authority and force of a Rule; and he must be a very unreasonable Man, who will desire any better Examples, than of the best and purest Churches.

Some are offended at the Superiority of Bishops over Presbyters, and the Inferior Clergy, which they say is expressly forbidden by Christ; The Kings

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of the Gentiles exercise Lorship over them, and they that exercise Authority upon them, are called Benefactors. But ye shall not be so, but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. In which words it is plain our Saviour forbids such kind of Authority over one another, as the Gentile Princes exercise over their Subjects ; but he does not forbid all kind of Superiority among the Ministers of the Gospel, as is evident from the Example even of the Apostolick Age. The Apostles indeed were all equal, had no superiority of Order or Power over one another ; and our Saviour in this place speaks only to the Apostles not to exercise Superiority over each other, *for there was a strife among them, which of them should be greatest :* But by our Saviour's own Institution, the Office of an Apostle was superior to the Seventy Disciples, whom he sent out to preach the Gospel. And after the Resurrection of Christ, the Apostles were supreme Governors of the Church ; and if we believe the first Records we have of the Christian Church, Bishops were the

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the Apostles Successors in their Power in the Church, and in their superiority over Presbyters and Deacons: and so the Government of the Church continued in the hands of Bishops till the Reformation, when the necessity of Affairs, and the aversion some Men had against Popish Tyrannical Bishops, perswaded some Reformers to lay aside the Order, which has been made the most specious Argument against the Reformation; and to say no more, If Episcopacy be Antichristianism, the whole Church was Antichristian for above fifteen hundred Years together, from the very Times of the Apostles themselves. But if it be an Apostolical Order, I know not what Authority any Man had to alter it; and for my own part, think that Communion safest which is most agreeable to the Pattern of the Apostolick Churches.

Others except against Forms of Prayer. Now not to take notice that Forms of Prayer were of old in use in the Jewish Church, and that our Saviour himself gave a Form of Prayer to his Disciples, we must grant, that we have no certain Evidence what the practice

ctice of the Church in the Apostles Days was in this respect. I am much of S. Chrysostom's Opinion, That there were in that Age of Miracles, extraordinary & miraculous Gifts of Prayer, as there was of Healing, and Prophesying, and working Miracles: Not that every Christian had these Gifts, any more than the Gift of Miracles, but there were some Persons who had the Gift of inspired Prayer for the publick benefit of the Church, which made it needless in that Age to have Forms of Prayer for Publick Worship; and when I see that Age of Miracles return again, I will gladly renounce the Liturgy to join in inspired Prayers.

But as Miracles ceased, so did the miraculous Gift of Prayer; and then, as the same Father observes, the Church worshipped God in allowed Forms; to be sure so it was in his days, and a great while before him; and if we cannot trace it to its first Original, for want of early Records in those Matters; yet I think he must be a very scrupulous Man, who would refuse to communicate with the Church in Constantine's Days, who composed Forms of Prayer for his Souldiers, which it is not probable

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ble he would have done, had not the Church at that time used Forms of Prayers.

*Foxes and
Firebrands.*

And so it continued till the Reformation, and the Reformation made no alteration in it; for the *Lutheran* and *Bohemian* Churches, the Church of *Geneva*, *France*, and *Holland*, have their Liturgies and Forms of Prayer, and so has the Church of *England* since the first Reformation of it; and that not only allowed, but advised by Mr. *Gavin* himself, till some Jesuits in *Malquerade* first set up that way of conceited and extemporary Prayers, on purpose to break good Order in our Church, as we are well assured by very credible Testimony.

Others scruple significant Ceremonies; and yet in the very Apostol days we find such in use, which are now disused, as the Holy Kiss, and the Love-Feast, which was an addition to the Lord's Supper, much more obnoxious to censure than the Cross in Baptism, and yet was retained for several Ages in the Church. In *Tertullian's* and *St. Cyprian's* Times, we find a great many

many symbolical and significant Ceremonies in use among them.

They frequently crossed themselves upon all Occasions, to shew that they were Christians; the baptized Person was cloathed in white, and thence *Whit-sunday* received its Name, because that was a solemn Time for Baptism, when those who were baptized were cloathed with white Garments.

It were easy to give you abundance of such Instances, which are so obvious to any one, who is acquainted with Ecclesiastical Writers, that it is superfluous to mention them.

In St. Austin's Time, Ceremonies were grown so numerous, that he verily much complains, not of the significance and symbolicalness, but of the burden of them; but never disturbed the Peace of the Church himself, Ep. ad *fa-*
but adviseth others to conform to the *near.*
Rites and Usages of any Church where they came, though different from the Customs of their own.

As far as I have observed, there never was any Schism occasioned in the Christian Church about significant Ceremonies, till of late among us, and it would

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These things carefully and impartially considered, must needs tend to compose Mens Minds, and reduce those who are gone astray, into the Communion and Unity of the Church : For my part, I should rather venture erring with all the Churches of Christ from the Apostles to this present Age, than break the Hedges of the Church, and Christian Communion, to follow some upstart new Lights, though it were possible they might lead me right.

SECT.

S E C T. III.

Containing an Answer to some popular Cavils, or a Vindication of the Church of England, from the Charge of Will-Worship, Superstition, Idolatry, Popery.

Let us now consider some popular Cavils and Exceptions, which too often prevail with some honest, but less thinking Men to forsake our Communion.

And I shall only mention those which concern the Rites and Ceremonies of our Church ; and all that I shall at present do here, shall be to answer some hard Words, and ill Names, which are given to our Worship ; and shew how ignorantly and injuriously they are applied to the Church of *England*. Such are these, *Will-Worship, Superstition, Idolatry, Popery*.

These are hard Words, which very few People understand, and therein the great force of the Objection lies ;

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as will appear from a particular examination of them.

First, *Will-Worship*. Now, when Men charge the Church of *England* with Will-Worship, they generally understand such a Worship, as is not commanded by God, but is originally owing to the Will and Invention of Men. Now this I absolutely deny, that there is any such thing as Will-Worship, in the Church of *England*.

The Worship of the *Church of England*, consists in publick Prayers and Praises, in reading the Scriptures, and expounding them to the People, and instructing them in the great Articles of Faith, and Rules of Life, in singing Psalms, and administering the Supper of our Lord, and such like Exercises of Devotion: All which are expressly commanded in Scripture, and therefore cannot be Will-Worship in this Sence; for they are not the Inventions of Men, but the Institutions of Christ. It is true, there are some Circumstances and Ceremonies of Religious Worship, used and enjoyed in the Church of *England*, which are not commanded by God; but these are no parts of Worship, and there-

therefore not *Will-Worship*. We do not think wearing a Surplice to be an act of Worship, nor expect to please God by any external Dress or Habit ; but we think it a decent Garb for those to use, who minister in Holy Things. We do not think Kneeling at the Sacrament to be an Act, but a Posture of Worship, as it is of Prayer ; and therefore do not kneel to the Bread and Wine, but receive them Kneeling, as expressing that Reverence and Devotion of Mind, which becomes such a mysterious Worship, and as a Posture suitable to those Prayers, which in the Act of receiving we put up to Heaven. The Cross in Baptism is not designed as any act of Worship to God, but as a visible Profession of our Faith in a crucified Saviour ; it is not a dedicating and covenanting Sign, which respects God, but at most an engaging Sign, which respects the Church ; and therefore is not an Act of Worship, much less Will-Worship.

To institute any new Kind or Species of Worship, is certainly unlawful ; as to make any new object of Worship, whether it be a visible representation,

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such as a Picture and Image ; or invisible Beings, as Angels, and deified Men, a numerous company of whom are worshipped in the Church of Rome ; or any new Acts of Worship, such as frequent Washings, Purgations, Sacrifices, Pilgrimages, &c. But the Circumstances and Ceremonies of Religious Actions, which are no where determined by God, may and must be determined, either by our own Prudence, or by the Prudence of our Governours, without the least suspicion of Will-Worship ; because they neither are, nor are designed for Acts of Worship.

Col. 2. 23.

But we must observe further, that this Word Will-Worship is found but once in all the Scripture, and some very wise and learned Men question, whether in that place Will-Worship be condemned by the Apostle, as an ill thing : the words are these ; *Which things have indeed a shew of Wisdom in Will-Worship and Humility, and neglecting the Body, not in any honour of satisfying the Flesh :* For they observe, that Will-Worship is joined with two other very good things, *Humility, and neglecting the*

the Body : ἐν ἀρεδλα σωματοῦ, which signifies external Severities and Mortifications, to keep down the Body and bring it into subjection, not to pamper it with high Nourishment, nor to make Provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof : which seems to be the meaning of what follows, *not in honour in satisfying the flesh* : for Honour, as St. Hierom observes, signifies taking Care of, and making Provision for it.

So that we may as well say, that Humility and bodily Severities, Strictness and Austerity of Life, in suppressing all the Motions of Lust, and the least inclinations to sensual Pleasures, are forbidden or censured by the Apostle, as that Will-Worship is ; for there is as much appearance of his condemning one as t'other.

And besides this, the Apostle says, that these things have *a shew of Wisdom* in Will-Worship, &c. λόγον σοφίας ; now we expound this to signify only a false appearance of Wisdom, yet that supposes, that Will-Worship, and Humility, and bodily Severities are in themselves good things, and parts of Religious Wisdom, when other things

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which are not good, gain a Reputation of Wisdom, by being like them ; for that which makes these things to have a shew of Wisdom, is, that they are mistaken for *Will-Worship, Humility, and neglecting the Body.*

And therefore, according to this way of expounding the Words, by Will-Worship we must understand voluntary Worship, which answers to Free-Will-Offerings under the Law, which were not commanded by God, but yet were very acceptable to him ; when Men do something more than God has expressly commanded, and deny themselves those Liberties and Enjoyments, which God allows, in order to some Spiritual End, to refine and purge their Souls, that they may arrive at more perfect attainments in Goodness.

And there is so much to countenance this Interpretation, that all the Superstitions in the World do deceive and abuse Men, and pass for excellent Attainments in Religion, under the shew and appearance of voluntary Worship, and Free-Will-Offerings, of doing something more than God has enjoyned them, whereby they think they so highly

ly merit of God, as to obtain the pardon of their sins, and become his peculiar Favourites. Thus the *Pharisees* thought to do, by observing the Traditions of their Fathers, by their frequent washings, Purifications, Fastings, and Tything even *Mint* and *Cummin*: Thus the Papists do by their Fastings, Pilgrimages, and Penances; but the mistake is, that this is but a false appearance of Wisdom, because though at first it looks like the noble generous Worship of Free-Will-Offerings, yet it is not so.

For though under the Law, Free-Will-Offerings were not commanded (which had destroyed the Nature of a Free-Will-Offering) yet there are directions given what such Persons shall offer to God, in case they do offer at all; and in particular that there shall be no blemish in it: which signifies, that this voluntary Worship must be confined to such Instances, as we know are acceptable to God; and therefore, when Men spend their Zeal in some voluntary Superstitions, which cannot please God, such things have only a shew, a false appearance of Wisdom, in voluntary Worship, because though their Wor-

Lev. 22.17.

Concerning Will-Worship.

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ship be voluntary, and so far commendable ; yet they do not make a wise choice of the Acts of Worship, do not worship God in an acceptable manner.

And this is the very case the Apostle mentions ; for the things which he says, have a shew of Wisdom, are either the worshipping Angels, ver. 18. which has a shew of Humility, that such mean and guilty Creatures dare not immediately approach to God without the Intercession of Angels, who are the great Ministers, Friends, and Favourites of God ; or those *Ordinances and Rudiments of the World, Touch not, taste not, handle not* ; 20, 21. which he calls, the *Doctrines and Commandments of Men*, ver. 22. by which he means, either the Jewish Laws of abstaining from certain Meats forbid by the Law of Moses, or the Pythagorean abstinence from the use of Women, or from eating any living Creature ; or, as it is most probable, both of them. These are those things, which have a shew of Wisdom in Will-Worship, and neglecting the Body, but indeed are not true Wisdom, nor an acceptable Worship of God : a great many

many such things, we may find in the Church of *Rome*, such as their praying to Saints and Angels, and the Virgin *Mary*, their Fastings, Penances, and Pilgrimages, &c. which are made substantial parts of Religion; but Circumstances, and Ceremonies of Worship, were never reckoned among them till now, by any ancient or modern Expositors.

Now though Will-Worship were in this place condemned by the Apostle, and these things condemn'd as parts of Will-Worship; yet the *Church of England* is not concerned in it, as having nothing in her Worship like these things; and we must not apply the Name of Will-Worship any farther than the Apostle has applyed it, or to such things as are analogous to what he condemns for Will-Worship; but yet it does not appear, that this voluntary Worship is condemned by the Apostle, or has the least ill Character affixed to it.

2. The second Accusation is Superstition; a Name which is at all adventures given to every thing, which Men dislike in Religion, and being a Name of

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of Reproach serves instead of all other Arguments, especially when they have no other at hand : Thus, to pray by a Form, to wear a Surplice, to kneel at the Lord's Supper, are all superstitious Ceremonies, and so they may for any thing they know, who most frequently use this Word, without understanding what it means ; and no Man need be at any greater trouble to vindicate the Church of *England* from the charge of Superstition, than to explain the Nature of it, which will soon convince them of their mistake in applying it.

Act. 17.22.

Now *δεισιδαιμονία*, which by *Tully* is rendered *Supersticio*, is by St. *Austin* called *Demonum Cultus*, the Worship of Demons, that is, of Angels or dead Men; and in this Sence, St. *Paul* at *Athens*, when he observed the Inscription of their Altar to an unknown God, says, that they were *δεισιδαιμονεστέροις*, that is, more superstitious than others, i.e. that they worshipped more Gods or Demons than other Heathen Nations, and possibly with more Devotion and Religious Observances.

But then, *δεισιδαιμονία* signifies a great dread and fear of their Demons
and

and Gods ; and therefore is made equivalent to φοβοθεία, a dread or fear of God. And, as a Learned Man observes, Dr. Ham. of this was originally owing to the belief Superst.

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of a divine Providence, and consequently of Rewards and Punishments in this World, and the next : for which reason Epicurus, though he did not deny the Being of a God, yet he removed him out of the World, and would not allow him to be Maker of the World, nor to intermeddle in humane Affairs ; and those who believed a Divine Providence, he rejected under the Notion of παισιδεῖμονες, Superstitious fearers of the Deity. Hence he represents the design of his Philosophy to be, to deliver Men from Superstition, that they might live without fear of any invisible Powers, or infernal Judges, of whom their Poets especially, told such frightful and tragical Stories ; and therefore, in other places, Superstition is made by him equivalent to the fear of Death, or the fear of punishment after Death. And in this sense, Superstition is nothing else but a Nick-Name for Religion, or such a fear of God as is the beginning of Wisdom ; but this was so troublesome and irksome

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to the Atheistical Philosopher, that he endeavoured to deliver himself and Mankind from the belief of a Divine Providence, or future Account: as in our Age, for the same reason, too many deny the Being of God, and endeavour to laugh and droll themselves into Atheism, that they may live secure from the fear of Punishment. But though every bad Man desires to do this, yet few can attain to it, the belief of a God sticks close to their Minds; and 'tis equally difficult for them to deny his Being, as to despise his Power: and therefore, they live in a perpetual dread of God, as an observer of their Actions, and a severe Judg, and can form no other Notion of him, but as of a powerful, domineering, imperious Tyrant.

And therefore, *Maximus Tyrinus* makes this the difference between a Religious and Superstitious Man: that a Religious Man goes to God *à l'env. des*, without any servile Fear and Horror, which we now commonly oppose to a Filial Fear, which is mixt with Love and Reverence; as a Son Loves and Honour his Father, which is the true Spirit of Religion; but a Superstitious Man

Man is horribly afraid of God, as a powerful Tyrant. Hence *Plutarch* observes, that an Atheist does not believe that there is a God, and a Superstitious Man wishes there were none.

And hence it comes to pass, that as Superstition makes Men fear God, so it teaches them to flatter him; for it is the natural temper of Fear to fawn and crouch, and by the basest and most servile Submissions, to court the Favour of an imperious Lord; and it is as natural for those, who are Proud, Severe, and Imperious to love to be flattered: and therefore those Men, who look on God only as Almighty Power, which is soon provoked, and cannot be satisfied, hope to appease so angry a Being, by some servile and flattering Submissions. Whence it is *Maximus Tyrius* represents a truly pious Man as God's Friend, and a Superstitious Man as his Flatterer; ὁ μὲν ἐυσεβὸς, φίλος οὐδὲ πλειστῶν πόλεων.

Now the true Reason of this Difference between the Religious and the Superstitious Man is this; that a truly Religious Man is one, who conforms himself to the Divine Nature, and admires

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mires the Wisdom of God's Laws, and the Beauty and Perfection of Virtue; and therefore, instead of this servile fear of God, he loves him as the most excellent Being, and securely hopes in him, as the most kind Father and bountiful Benefactor, and delights to pay him such Homage and Worship, as is suitable to his Nature and Perfections. But a Superstitious Man is one, who is in love with some Vice or other, which he fears God will punish him for, but cannot and will not part with it; and therefore fears God, and flatters him, and invents such Arts to appease an offended and angry Deity, as a Slave would do to pacify his Lord.

And here is the true Original of all that, which we call Superstitious Worship; which is nothing else, but such a Worship, as Superstitious Men pay to God, to appease his Anger, and to flatter him into a good Opinion of them: For Superstition is properly seated in the Mind, as Religion is; and that is a Superstitious Worship, which serves the Ends of Superstition; as that is true Religious Worship, which expresseth the sincere Devotion of the Mind, and is

is fitted to the Nature and Ends of true Religion.

This was the Original of those numerous Sacrifices, which were offered by the Heathens, at least they were abused to this Purpose by Superstitious Minds, to appease their angry Gods by the Blood of the Sacrifice, instead of their own: especially those barbarous Sacrifices of Men, and Children, which it is impossible, should ever have any other Original than Superstition: For Men must be in an horrible dread and fear of God, and entertain very frightful Apprehensions of him, before they can either persuade themselves to offer, or believe, that God will accept of such Sacrifices.

To the same Original is owing their worship of Demons and Inferior Deities, as Intercessors for them to the more powerful God; for Men who are afraid, endeavour to make all the Friends they can to a powerful Adversary; and it not only makes a shew of Humility, as the Apostle speaks, that Men dare not go directly to God, but employ his great Ministers to speak for them; but it signifies also a great dread of him: for had Men right apprehensions

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fions of the Nature of God, and were conscious to themselves of a sincere Love and Reverence of him, and a desire to please and to be like him, they would be no more afraid to pray to him, than a Child is to ask his Father for what he wants, especially since God himself has appointed a Mediator to intercede for us.

Thus superstitious Men, who have a mind to appease God, and to keep their sins, endeavour to court and flatter him with an arbitrary and external Worship; either with a pompous shew, such as was their carrying the Images of their Gods in Procession, which was so magnificent a sight, that many Christians were tempted to be present at it, which was condemned and censured by the Ancient Fathers; or with publick Feasts and Sports, their *Solennes Ludi*, instituted in honour of their Gods, in which so many ancient Christians suffered Martyrdom; or frequent Washings and Purifications, or external Severities to their Bodies, as Whippings, and cutting themselves till the Blood gushed out, as the Priests of *Baal* did; or by prostituting their Wives and Daughters, and defiling them-

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themselves in honour of their Wanton Deities; Or by abstaining from certain Meats, and being initiated into the Mysteries of their Religion, by severe and troublesome Methods. In these and such-like things consisted that superstitious Worship, which the Heathens paid to their Gods, in such external Rites as were expensive, costly, or troublesome, which they thought apt and proper to atone for their Sins, and batter their angry Gods into a good liking of them, while they continued in sin. Their Worship did not consist in any real and substantial Acts of Piety and Devotion, were not designed, and had no tendency in them to make them more like to God, or to do any real Honour to his Nature and Perfections, but were an external piece of Pageantry, like the crouchings and fawnings of Slaves to their Imperious Lords.

And thus a superstitious Mind may turn even Divine Institutions into a superstitious Worship, as the Hypocritical Jews did, who had no respect to the nature and signification of those external Rites of Worship which God

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appointed, but doted upon the Letter of the Law, and thought to please God with the external performance of them. They gloried in the Circumcision of the Flesh, but had no regard to the Circumcision of the Mind and Spirit; they thought it enough that they descended from *Abraham* by Carnal Generation, but took no care to imitate the Faith of their Father *Abraham*: They boasted of the Temple of the Lord, which was the visible Symbol of God's Presence with them, and residence among them, though they made it a Den of Thieves. They punctually observed their New Moons, and Sabbaths, and Solemn Assemblies, though they defiled themselves with all manner of wickedness, insomuch that God abhorred his own Worship, as much as the Pagan Superstitions; and though he instituted it himself, yet denies that he required it from them. *When you come to appear before me; Who hath required this at your hands, to tread my Courts?*

Ifa. i. 12.

And thus profest Christians may, and do, turn the Institutions of our Saviour into the grossest Superstitions; when they

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they think it sufficient to carry them to Heaven, that they are baptized, and call themselves Christians, and say their Prayers, and hear Sermons, and receive the Sacrament, without attending to the end of all this, which is, to transform them into a Divine Nature, to purify their Minds from all earthliness and sensuality, and thereby fit them for the happiness of a Spiritual World.

The sum of all is this, That Superstition is not properly in any Act of Worship, but in the Mind ; Divine Institutions may be abused to Superstitious Purposes, and Humane Institutions, which are meer Matters of Decency and Order, may be used without Superstition. The Superstition of Heathens, Jews, and Christians, differ in their Acts, but agree in their Principle, too great a Fear and Flattery of God.

But yet from what I have discoursed, we may collect some plain Rules, to judg what is Superstitious, and what not ; and when we may be charged with Superstition, and when not :

R. 3

i. Then

P A R T . I .

1. Then Men are certainly Superstitious, when they think they shall please or displease God, merely by doing or not doing some indifferent things, which he has neither commanded, nor forbidding. To think to please God, and to make him our Friend by any Arbitrary Rites and Usages in Religion, is to think that God may be flattered by external and insignificant Complements, which is the true Spirit of Superstition; and to think that God will be displeased with us for doing some indifferent Things, which he hath no where forbidd, argues a superstitious dread and horror of him, so that we dare not use that liberty which he has no where restrained; *Touch not, taste not, handle not;* that is, to forbid doing those things which God has allowed, or at least not forbid, is more certainly an Act of Superstition, than to do those things which God has not commanded; for Men may do what God has not commanded, without any superstitious Conceit about it; but they cannot forbid doing what God has not forbid, without placing Religion in not doing it, and to make any thing an Act of Religion, and to think

think to please God with it, which is no Act of Religion, is certainly superstitious.

a. Then Men are guilty of Superstition in the external Acts of Religion, whether they be instituted by God or not, when they think to please God by the bare external performance of them : for whatever is external in Religion, cannot be acceptable to God for it self : *In Christ Jesus neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision, but a new Creature, and Faith which worketh by Love, and Obedience to the Commandments of God :* And to hope to please God with any thing else, is to hope to flatter him, and to compound with him for the breach of his Laws, and the want of an inward vital Principle of Religion, by external Hypocrisies and Superstitions.

But on the other hand we may be sure ;

b. That no Man can be guilty of Superstition, who hopes to please God, and obtain his Favour, only by an Universal Righteousness, and Holiness of Heart and Life. Such a Man is truly

truly Religious, who endeavours to conform his Mind to the Divine Nature and Image, and to frame his Conversation by the eternal Laws of Goodness ; he neither fears nor flatters the Deity, as the Superstitious Man does, but is the Son and the Friend of God, and the external Expressions and Exercises of his Religion are fitted to the great ends of an Universal Holiness.

3. That cannot be the matter of Superstition, which is not made or judged an acceptable part of Divine Worship : for Superstition can be only in such things, wherein we hope to please God ; and this effectually justifies the Church of England from the charge of Superstition, with respect to the External Rites of Worship, which she declares to be no parts nor acts of Worship, but such Circumstances, and Ceremonies, as make the external performance of the Acts of Worship decent and solemn, and are useful to Edification ; to help Men to worship God better, not to please God by such external Rites.

The

The third Accusation of the Worship of the Church of *England* is Idolatry, a terrible, and yet a ridiculous Charge. But Idolatry is an odious Name, and that is enough; if there be those who are bold enough to say it, they will be sure to find some of their Proselytes ignorant enough to believe it: It is but calling the Common-Prayer Book and Ceremonies *Idols*, and then they are plainly forbid in the Second Commandment, *Exodus* 20. 4. How
But is there indeed no difference between worshipping God in a sober and pious form of words, and worshipping a Graven Image? No difference between wearing a Surplice, and falling down to a Stock or Stone? No difference between signing Children with the sign of the Cross, and dedicating them to an Idol, or false God? Whither does a blind Zeal transport these Men! I am sure this is much more like Blasphemy, than any thing in our Worship is like Idolatry; but such an Argument as this does not deserve to be answered, nor such Men

de^o



deserve to be reasoned with ; those
who can abuse themselves and others
with such formidable Nothings, stand
more in need of Physick than a sober
Consideration. quicquid in agendo
ad eum sit dignum si tali bus omni-
bus. 4. Another Accusation of the Wor-
ship of the Church of England is
That it is Popery : And so indeed it
is as much Popery as it is Superstition
and Idolatry : And thus our Reli-
gious Princes, and Godly Bishops, are
well rewarded for reforming Religion,
with infinite pains and labour, and to
their imminent perill : It cost many Martyrs
their Lives, and would have made the
Growth to shake, had it not been secured
by an Omnipotent Hand, and All-seeing
Providence ; and all this it seems for
nothing, for we are not got out of
Babylon yet. That Command still lies
against the Church of England, as our
Ancestors believed it did against the
Church of Rome, Come out from among
them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing, and I will
receive you. ad quidnam vero in gratia
It is somewhat strange that God
should suffer our Reformers, who were
so

so sincere and honest, who spared no pains, and feared no danger to purge the House of God, so retain so much of the old Leaven, as makes it unsafe for all good Christians to partake in such Worship. lo anointing that bane bof

And it is strange that they Papists should be such mortal Enemies to the Church of England, which is so heart & kin to Reformation, and took so kindly upon our new Thorough Reformers.

But I would desire these Men to tell me, what Point of Popery is still retained in the Doctrine, Government, or Discipline of our Church? O say they, that is quickly done, The very Office of Bishops is a Relique of Popery: And if this be so, then the whole Christian Church, from the very first institution of it, has been popishly affected; for if we will allow the Apostles to have had an Episcopal Power and Authority, we find no Christian Church without Bishops, till the Reformation, that is, for long Years; and I confess I never thought Popery could have pleaded such Antiquity, and early prescription.

That

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That Supream and Sovereign Power, which the Bishop of *Rome* challenges over all other Bishops, and Secular Princes; nay that uncontroulable Authority he challenges over the Laws of God, and Institutions of our Saviour, to change and alter them by his infallible Decrees, when he pleases; his absolute Power to forgive Sins, and to dispose of Heaven and Hell, is no doubt, the perfection of that Apostacy, which was foretold should happen in the latter days; and if our Bishops challenge any such Power to themselves, I will own them to be Antichristian and Popish: But we may see, what admirable Reformers those are like to make, who know not how to distinguish between an Apostolical Office, and Antichristian Usurpations.

But the Common-Prayer Book is Popish: I beseech you wherein; as it is a Form of Prayer? Then our Saviour taught Men Popery, for he taught his Disciples to pray by a Form; and the whole Book of *Psalms* must be rank Popery, which consists only of Forms of Prayer, and Thanksgiving, composed for the use of the Temple. But

But is there any Remains of Popish Worship in our Liturgy? are there any Prayers to Saints or Angels, or the *Virgin Mary*? Are our Prayers concealed from us in an unknown Tongue? Do we not understand what we say, what Petitions we put up to God? Do you find the Sacrifice of the Mass, or any Reliques of it in our Liturgy? Thanks be to God, for our Reforming Bishops and Martyrs, who purged our Worship from all these Abominations.

But the Common-Prayer Book is taken out of the Mass-Book, and therefore it is but Popery still. This I will in part grant, but deny the Consequence; for every thing in the Mass-Book was not Popery, unless you will say, that the Creed, Ten Commandments, and Lord's Prayer, are parts of Popery.

The plain case is this, You must consider the Church of *Rome*, as a true Church corrupted, and degenerated from its Primitive Institutions; for we must acknowledg, that the Church of *Rome*, was not inferior in all Gifts and Graces to the most eminent Churches in the World, in the Apostles days, and seve-



several Ages after. And therefore no wonder, if in its greatest degeneracy, it retained some small Remains of its ancient Piety and Devotion, which was buried in the midst of Rubbish, and Idolatrous Superstitions.

Consider then, what the proper work of a Reformer must be? to pull up Root and Branch; to pull up the Wheat with the Tares? This would be not to reform a corrupt Church, but to make a new one: This would be to eat off the sound, with the rotten Members; and is like pulling down a well constituted Government, to correct Abuses. I pray God preserve us from such Reformers as these.

In a word, If these Men, who accuse the Church of *England* of Popery, can shew any thing practised among us, which is peculiar to Popery, which cannot be justified by the Precepts and Examples of Scripture, and the first and purest Churches, I will heartily joyn with them in calling for a Reformation. In the mean time I would desire them to consider, that they do Popery too much Reputation, by giving up the

The Charge of Popery.

the Church of *England* to it, and make
the name of Popery a less formidable
thing, when it is thus indifferently ap-
plied to a corrupt, and to a reformed
Church. I wish with all my Soul they
were half so free from Popish Princi-
ples, and Practices in matters of Civil
Government, as the Church of *England*
is from a Popish Worship.

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La Cura de la Piel

etiam bona et cito velutina. Et dicitur quod
ad hanc puerum. Et ergo hoc eum ad
ipsam puerum dicitur et cito velutina.
Et dicitur et hoc apertum est et bellis
vixit puerus quia illa dicitur illius. Et dicitur
dicitur illius mox eum dicitur illius. Quia
hunc dicitur et cito velutina. Et dicitur
hunc dicitur et cito velutina. Et dicitur illius.

quidam Writings & notes

MURA

PART II.

*Concerning those Disorders
and Miscalriages, which
some men are guilty of in
Church Communions.*

C H A P. I.

*Concerning those, who ordinarily for-
sake the Communion of their Parish
Churches.*

HAving discours'd thus largely
of those, who wholly sepa-
rate themselves from Chris-
tian Communion, who ei-
ther communicate with no Church, or
forsake the Communion of the Church



Concerning Parochial Communion.

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of *England*; I now proceed to correct those Miscarriages, which some, who profess themselves of our Communion, are too notoriously guilty of.

And I shall first begin with those, who ordinarily forsake the Communion of their Parish Churches. This has been an old and inveterate evil, of long use and practice, especially in the great and populous City; and it may be thought a daring and fruiless attempt to oppose it; however I have this satisfaction, that no man can reasonably suspect, that I serve any other interest by this, but the interest of peace and order, and the better edification of the Christian Church; which must reasonably engage all men the more impartially to consider what I shall now offer, which shall be comprised under these two General Heads.

First, Our obligations to Parochial Communion: 2. An Answer to some Objections against it.

First, Our Obligations to Parochial Communion: which will appear in these particulars;

1. That Parochial Communion is in it self an excellent Institution for the more regular Instruction and Government

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ment of the Christian Church : we do not indeed pretend, that the division of an Episcopal Church into several Parishes with their distinct Pastors set over them, is in a strict sense of Divine Institution : for Christ and his Apostles did not by an express Law determine the Bounds and Extent of Bishopricks, much less of Parochial Communions ; nor indeed was it possible to do it in those dayes, when the greatest number of people were either Jews or Heathens. Nor was there any need of this, it being at last an acknowledged Principle among Dissenters themselves, and those of the greatest note ; *That the directive Light of Nature is sufficient to guide us in such things as these ; the times and seasons of Church Assemblies, the order and decency, wherein in all things are to be transacted in them ; the bounding of them, as to the number of their members, and places of habitation, so as to answer the ends of their institution.* And therefore if this Parochial Communion be of great use to the edification of Christians, it not only justifies the Wisdom of the Church in the first Institution of it, but severely condemns those, who break and vio-

Dr. Owen's
Enquiry into
the Original
of Churches,
P. 14.

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late so useful an Institution. The whole Christian Church is but one Body and Society of Christians united to Christ, who is the Head of this Body : and therefore, were it possible, should all worship their common Father and Saviour together : but since the number of Christians , and their great distance from each other, will not admit this, they are divided into less Societies, for the more convenient Administration of holy Offices, and the exercise of Christian Discipline and Government.

How can any thing in a Christian Nation be more useful for all the ends of Church Society , than the distribution of Christians into Parochial Communions ?

To enjoy the liberty of publick Assemblies near our own dwellings, without being forced to seek for it at a distance , would have been thought a great priviledge in former Ages ; like the heavenly Manna falling round about the Tents of the true *Israelites*.

To have a fixed Pastor, who is particularly entrusted with the care of your souls, to whom you may at all times freely resort, and disclose your spiritual

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spiritual wants, whose neighbourhood and conversation may contract a particular friendship and familiarity, and beget a mutual confidence and endearment, is quite a different thing from some publick and general exhortations; and the reason why men do not more value the benefit and advantage of a Parochial Guide, is because generally they make so little use of him.

This is the truest emblem of Catholic Unity, when we hold personal Communion with those Christians who are our neighbours, and so in the nearest disposition for it: for our obligation to Christian Communion extends it self to all Christian Societies, which live in the Communion of the Church; and to pick up a Church for constant and ordinary Communion here and there from stragling members, who live in remote and distant places, is to make a Schismatical difference between Christians, as if all Christians were not of the same body, nor fit for personal Communion: and though forsaking our Parish Churches for other Churches in the same Communion be not so formal a Schism, yet it has some tendency that way, it be-

S P 3 ing

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ling a forsaking the Communion of our neighbour Christians and Parochial Guide.

There is no other Rule, that I know of, for personal Communion, but co-habitation, or dwelling together in the same neighbourhood; for then we communicate with the Catholick Church, when we communicate with that part of it, wherein we live: but when without just cause we ordinarily forsake the Communion of Parochial Assemblies, we disturb the most convenient order of Church Communion, and make a Rent and Schism in the Church, as total Separation makes a Schism from the Church.

Neighbour Christians have the most frequent occasions of conversing with each other, and therefore many great ends of Christian Communion are best attained among them: they may exhort and rebuke one another, and provoke unto love and good works; they may watch over one anothers souls, and when they observe each others mis-carriages (which they cannot avoid observing, when they live so near, and converse so often together) they may apply such timely remedies, as may help

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help up those who fall, or prevent the fall of those, who trip and stumble; and when the case is beyond their private redress, may call in the help of their Pastor, who by his wise Counsels and seasonable Exhortations and Re-proofs, and pious and ardent prayers, may convince those who have sinned, and restore them by repentance, and obtain their pardon, or strengthen and confirm those who were assaulted by temptations, and procure fresh supplies of Grace for them.

We see indeed very little of this now, and the reason of it is very plain, because few men consider, what are the Duties of Christian Communion, but are too much unconcerned what becomes of their Brothers soul; they think every man must look to himself, but do not feel that sympathy and compassion and care, which one member has for another; that whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it; but were men sensible of the necessity of this mutual care of each others souls, it could never be better discharged than among neighbours, who live under each others eye.

And

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And were men faithful in this, it would be a more effectual way to preserve the Church from the infection of putrid and corrupt members, than particular Church associations, and all the Tests they could use or invent of real Sainthood in admitting Church members.

The great Exception against Parochial Communion, which has formerly been, and is still managed by the *Independents*, is, that there are a great many bad men in our Communion, that Discipline is not duly exercised among us, to remove those from Christian Communon, who have forfeited their right to it by their vicious lives; but though this is no just reason for Separation, and there is a greater noise made about it, than there is any occasion for: since such notorious sinners usually excommunicate themselves, and if they do now and then hear a Sermon (which I suppose they would not deny to *Turks* and *Heathens* and *Infidels*, as being the most likely Means for their Conversion) yet never approach the Lords Table, or are rejected, when known; yet I say would every Christian faithfully do his part (and without

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out this it is impossible Discipline should be duly administered in any Church state.) Parochial Communion is the most effectual means to preserve the Church pure, it being almost impossible any man should be guilty of any gross and scandalous vices, but some of his neighbours must know it; which is more than can be said of any Congregation, whose members live at a distance from each other, and rarely converse together, and when they do can easily put on greater reservedness and caution, and appear quite other men, than their common conversation speaks them to be.

Love and Unity is a necessary duty of Christian Religion, it is the badge of our discipleship, *By this shall all men know, that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another:* Now though we must love all Christians, as members of the same body, yet neighbours have the greatest reason by all possible arts and endearments, to secure their love to each other; because they have the most frequent occasions of quarrels and contentions, if they do not: it is a much harder thing to maintain love and peace among men, who live together

John 13. 35.

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they and have different interests, which are many times cross to each other; than among those who live at a distance, and seldom see one another; and there cannot be a more firm and lasting cement of Peace and Union, than Christian Communion is, when they worship God in the same place, and put up their united Prayers and Thanksgivings to him, and eat at the same Table, as members of the same body, and children of the same Father, and heirs of the same promises. This is a powerful argument to the love of all Christians, but it does more sensibly endear us to those, who are as it were of the same household and family: and since there is greater need of this endearment among neighbours, than strangers, Parochial Communion, which is made up of Christian neighbours, who daily converse with each other, does better answer the end of Christian Communion, than gathered Churches.

I add further, that in Parochial Communion every particular Christian in a Nation, may be provided for, which cannot ordinarily be done in gathered Churches; for every particular man be-

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longs to one Parish or another, and is by Law bound to communicate in it, and if he do not, may be discovered, and corrected either by private admonitions or publick censures: but when men forsake their Parochial Communion, it is impossible to give any account of them; they may be of this Church, or of that, or of none at all. It is impossible for the Governours of the Church, who are to take care of every particular wandring Sheep, to give such an account of their charge in any other Church state, as in Parochial Communions; and that is a sufficient argument to prove, that it is a very useful and necessary Constitution, and the more useful and necessary it is, the greater fault is it in those, who without great reason disturb good order, and though they know, how to use this liberty wisely and innocently themselves, yet give an ill example to those, who will make a bad use of it.

I shall add but one thing more, and that is with reference to the good Government of your families: you cannot ordinarily have such inspection over your Children and Servants, when you

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you go to other Churches, as when you can appoint them their Seats or stations in your own, where you may have your eye upon them, and observe their carriage and behaviour ; and your example in forsaking your own Church, will be apt to teach them to do so too ; and I have reason to fear, that this has too often occasioned the debauchery of many, otherwise hopeful, young men.

The sum is this, that though the division of Churches into Parish bounds under the conduct of a Parochial Minister be not founded on any express Law of God , yet it is so highly useful to all the great ends of Church Communion, that it must needs be a very great fault lightly or wantonly to violate so wholesome an Institution.

2. Because the great plea, which is made by those, who communicate with our Church , for forsaking their Parish Churches, is the different abilities of Preachers ; and every one is desirous to hear those Preachers whom he likes best, and thinks there is no hurt in it : I shall, as plainly as I can, and with as little offence as may be, consider this matter.

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1. And first I observe, that this is a great pretence of others, for Separation from our Church, that they can profit more by *Non-conforming* than by *Conforming* Preachers, and therefore forsake our Churches, and joyn themselves to separate Congregations; and methinks wise and good men should not like a principle, which so easily leads men into Separation, and ends in Schism. I confess, there is a great deal of difference, between taking the best care we can of our souls in the Communion of the Church, and involving our selves in the guilt of Schism upon this pretence; but yet that is a suspicious argument, which tends towards Schism; which in its greatest innocency breaks good orders, and wholesome Constitutions, and when it is fully pursued, may lead giddy and unstable minds into Separation.

2. There is so much unaccountable fancy and humour to be seen in those different judgements, men make of Preachers, that it were a very hard case, if the Peace and Order and Government of the Church were to lye at the mercy of mens different fancies. Some are taken with a grave and solid, others

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others with a florid and polite Preacher; some are pleased with a tone, others with earnestness and vehemence of action and voice. How often do many men vary in their opinions of Preachers, and change their Churches, as their fancy changes? Those Preachers, who are disliked by their own Parishioners, are very often admired by strangers: Now what work would this make in all Civil Governments, were fancy suffered to over-rule publick establishments; and we have as little reason to expect, that God will allow of such inroads of phancy upon the Order and Government of the Church.

The design of Church Communion, and of Preaching the Gospel, is not to please and tickle a wanton phancy, but to instruct us in the plain duties of the Gospel, and to furnish us with the arguments and motives to a holy life; and thanks be to God, such discourses we may meet with in most Churches in this Nation, especially in this great City, though it may be not always dressed to every mans palate.

It is a sign men are full fed, when they cannot be contented with plain and wholesome

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wholsome food, but complain, if they have not some delicious Sauces to crease and tempt an appetite. In this I am sure is certain, that men, who govern themselves by such fancies, do not alwayes make the wifest choice; nor the best improvement. Suppose your Parochial Ministers do not appear to be the best Preachers, the profoundest Divines, nor the most moving Orators, consider whether this may not in great meaſure be owing to yourselves: whether your withdrawing yourselves from their instructions, may not make them more flight and careleſſ in their preparations. Preachers are men ſubject to humaine infirmities, and in all caſes or in apt to dispirit men, to fee all their paine and labour despised and slighted, especially in this caſe, which makes them uncapable of doing that ſervice to the ſouls of men, which their Office requires, and which they do paſſionately deſire. Men who are above the vanity of a great Auditory, are yet deſirous to preach to thofe, whom they are concerned to instruct, and are grieved to ſee them turn their backs upon them. You might many times have better

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Sermons, did you not discourage your Preachers by such neglects:

4. Consider farther, that you are particularly accountable for the improvement of those means of Grace, which you did or might have enjoyed in the Communion of your Parish Churches. God is not the Author of Confusion, but of Order and Peace; and therefore requires us to keep our station; and when the Providence of God, and the Laws of Church and State, have placed us under such a Ministry, we are accountable for no more, than what we can enjoy with the preservation of the Peace, and Order, and Government of the Church: and if our improvements be proportionable to this, we shall not lose our reward.

But now suppose, by pursuing your wandering fancies, ye fall into any mistakes, or are ignorant of any part of your duty, when ye might have been better instructed, had ye diligently and constantly attended the Parochial Ministry, what excuse can such men make for themselves? they are misled, but it was occasioned by forsaking that Guide, whom the Divine Providence had provided for them; they sin ignorantly,

ignorantly; but they might have known better, had they not withdrawn themselves from such instructions: certainly those Men act more safely, with reference to a future account, who make the best use they can of such Instructions, as the Providence of God provides for them; than those, who leave their Rank and Order to chuse better for themselves.

5. We may also reasonably expect the greater Assistance of the Divine Spirit in preserving good Order, which will tend more to our spiritual Increase and Growth, than the best external means of Edification: the success does not depend upon the Gifts and Abilities of the Preacher, but upon the influences of God's Grace: *Who then is 1 Cor. 3. 5; Paul, and who is Apollos, but Ministers 6, 7; by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every Man? I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the Increase: so then, neither is he that planteth anything, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the Increase.* Some little imperfect hints may more enlighten our minds, when the Divine Spirit is pleased to teach us, than the most exact and elaborate Discourse; and plain truths

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without any Art or Varnish, may be conveyed with more warmth and vigour to our Souls and Consciences, and may affect us more, than all the charms of humane Eloquence. If Men design only pleasing their Fancies, that they may do better by gratifying their curiosity ; but he, who has no other design in hearing, but to save his Soul, ought principally to take care, that he may enjoy the Influences of the Holy Spirit, which alone can make the external Ministry of the Word effectual ; and the best way to do that, is to observe good order ; for he is a Spirit of Love, and Peace, and Unity, and Order, and therefore is more concerned to supply the defects and imperfections of external Ministers, which we conscientiously submit to, and diligently attend, to preserve good Order in the Church.

6. The constant attendance on a meaner Ministry, is much more for our edification, than an occasional hearing much better Sermons. It is too much the humour of many Men, who forsake their own Church, to be constant to none ; and by this means they may hear a great many excellent Sermons, and

and yet not be thoroughly instructed in all parts of their Duty: whereas every Minister, who makes Conscience of instructing his People committed to him, will take care, at one time or other, to teach them all the great Articles of Faith, and Rules of Life, which though it may not be so taking and popular, is yet more useful than some general Discourses, and pressing and vehement Exhortations, without a particular explication of their Duty. Which shews the advantage of attending a constant Ministry, especially if Men would acquaint themselves with their Minister, whereby he might the better understand, how to apply himself to their particular Cases, to fit his Instructions to their Capacities, and his Counsels, Exhortations, and Reproofs to their Spiritual Wants. This may suffice to shew our Obligations to Parochial Communion.

2. The second thing proposed, was, to answer some Objections against this; and they are only some hard Cases, which make Parochial Communion very nauseous and unpleasant to honest minds, or very dangerous. As to name some of the hardest:

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i. The case of a vicious and scandalous Minister, who, like *Eli's Sons*,
makes the Sacrifice of God to be abhorred:

I am in great hope, that the number of these Men is not great, though one were too much: and yet it is not to be expected, that in so great a Body of Men, there should be none: Let the Enemies of God and of Religion, triumph in this, and encrease their numbers, while we silently lament it.

But when this is the case, I think every good Man should apply himself to his Superiours, and endeavour to remove him: if this cannot be done, or is too long delayed, he must learn to distinguish between the Man and his Office; a bad Man, but yet a legal Minister; and tho' he be unworthy of so holy a Profession, yet the efficacy of his Ministry does not depend upon his personal Qualifications, but on the Institution of Christ. The Lewdness of *Ely's Sons*, though it gave great offence and scandal to the *Israelites*, yet it did not make them forsake the Altar of God: The Scribes and Pharisees in our Saviour's days, were a vile sort of People, but yet he does not command his Disciples to withdraw from their

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Mat. 23.2,3.

Communion, but not to follow their Examples. *The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses's Seat; all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do, but do not after their Works, for they say and do not.* And upon these Principles St. Austin disputes against the *Donatists*, and will not allow the personal Miscarriages of Ministers, to be a just cause of Separation: and yet if in such cases, a serious Christian with Prudence and Modesty, and with as little noise and scandal as may be, preserving the Communion of the Church, should joyn in Communion with a neighbouring Minister, I should not see much reason to blame him: for it is no schism, while he continues in the Communion of the Church, and only forsakes the Communion of his Parish Minister upon too just an offence.

2. The case of an ignorant Minister; and I hope this case is not very frequent neither, at least not such gross Ignorance, as shall make a Man utterly uncapable of such a Function: and yet it cannot be expected, that all the Parishes in *England* should be supplyed with Learned Preachers, when there are so many Livings, that will hardly

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find Bread for a Family.

But we must consider, that our Church has made excellent provision in this case; has taken care, that the instruction of her Children, shall not wholly depend upon the personal Abilities of the Minister. Our Liturgy is the same, whatever the Ministers abilities be, which contains a very excellent form of Worship, and Administration of Sacraments; the Catechism, which he is bound to teach the Children, contains the substance of Christian Religion in few and plain words; and the Homilies which are appointed to be read, are very useful and pious Sermons upon most of the material heads of Religion; that though the Minister be no great Scholar, if he be but honest and diligent in observing the Rules and Directions of the Church, his People cannot want sufficient Instructions. And this one Instance shews the great necessity and advantage, of publick Liturgies and Homilies, which secures the decent performance of Religious Worship, and the instruction of the People in sound and wholesome Doctrine, notwithstanding the personal Defects and In-

Inabilities of the Minister; what case such poor Parishes were in, when these Provisions were cried down, as Popish and Antichristian, I cannot guess.

3. The Case of an erroneous and heretical Minister, who mixes Poison with his Doctrine, and corrupts the plainness and simplicity of the Christian Religion; and can any Christian, who is bound to take care of his Soul, think it his Duty to expose himself to the perpetual danger and temptation of erroneous Doctrines? In answer to which, consider,

1. That People are very ill Judges of Errors and Heresy; the most ancient and most useful Doctrines of Christianity, have sometimes been thought so; and when we have so many Men intent and zealous to seduce our People, it is an easy matter to whisper the danger of being infected by a corrupt and heretical Doctrine. Some think every thing Heresy, but *Antinomianism*; to persuade Men to a good Life, to tell them, that there are certain Conditions annexed to the Gospel-Covenant; without the performance of which, we shall not be saved: that

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not an idle and notional, but an active and working Faith justifies ; that we are saved by Christ, not as a Proxy, who has done all for us, but as a Priest and Sacrifice and Mediator, who has expiated our Sins by his Death, and sealed the Covenant of Grace in his Blood, and now powerfully intercedes for us with his Father, and sends his Spirit into the World to be a Principle of a new Life in us : these and such like Doctrines are by some Men reproached with the name of Heresy : and upon their Authority believed to be so by others : and yet if Men must withdraw their Communion for the sake of such Heresies as these, they must forsake the most useful Preachers, and most Orthodox Churches : and therefore,

2. The charge of Heresy must be very plain and notorious, before it can justify our Breach of Communion. If Men deny any plain Article of the Christian Faith, it is dangerous to intrust the care of our Souls with them, for they are at best but Wolves in Sheeps cloathing ; but to suspect Men of Heresy, when there is no evidence of it, is it self a very great fault ; and difference

difference of Judgment and Opinion about some less matters in Religion, which we are always like to differ about, *while we see in part, and know only in part*, may exercise mutual forbearance, but will not excuse Men from the Guilt of such causeless Separations.

3. Where the Presumptions are very strong, we must appeal to Church-Governours to detect his Errors and Heresies, if he have any, and to secure the Flock from such apparent danger. Private Reformations usually prove more fatal, than the Mischiefs which they are designed to remedy: and what I said in the case of an ignorant Minister, is very applicable to this, the publick Prayers and Administration of Sacraments, and Catechism, cannot be corrupted by the greatest Heretick, if he observe his Rule; and this secures the Purity of Worship, and wholsome Instructions: and as for his Sermons, it only concerns Men to be wary what Doctrines they receive from him, to take nothing upon trust, but to search the Scriptures, whether such things be so. Such a course as this, will maintain good Order in the Church,

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Church, without any danger to our Faith.

4. When the Bounds of Parishes, and the Number of People is too large for Parochial Communion. This has often been made a pretence to justify Separate Meetings, because the number of People is much greater in many Parishes, than can be contained in one Church. The Complaint is too true, and worthy of the care of publick Authority to redress it ; but this is no just Reason for Separation, though it be a Reason for such Persons, who are shut out of their own Parish Churches, to go to others, where they can be received ; for where Publick Authority has not made sufficient Provision for Parochial Communion, Men who love their Souls, must provide for themselves in the Communion of the Church.

C H A P. II.

Concerning Irreverence in Worship.

ANother great Miscarriage, which many professed Christians are guilty of, is an irreverent performance of Religious Worship ; if that may be called Religious Worship, which is not attended with all the solemn Expressions of Reverence and Devotion.

There are so many Instances of this, that the very naming of them, will be thought sharp and satirical. There are but few Christians, who put on that true gravity and seriousness of looks and behaviours, as becomes the presence of God, and the solemnity of Religious Worship. You shall see some gazing about them with a roving and wandring Eye, as if they came only to see, and to be seen, to observe every new Face, or new Dress and Garb, and therefore too often set themselves out with that fantastick gaitiness,

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which more becomes a Play-house than a Church. You shall see others talk, or whisper, or laugh, to the great offence and scandal of all serious and devout Minds. Others instead of worshipping God, sleep away the Prayers or Sermon, or both, as if they were not concerned in either : It is possible indeed for very devout Men sometimes to be surprized with Sleep, but it is a great Indecency, when ever it is so, and requires great care to prevent it, in our selves and others ; and is a great Contempt of God and his Worship, when it grows into a custom, and Men as naturally dispose themselves to a sleeping posture, as if it were the design of their coming to Church. You shall see others sit all the time of Divine Service, which would be thought a very great Rudeness, when we put up a Petition to an Earthly Prince : this was unknown in the ancient Church, wherein for some Ages, they did not so much as sit either while the Scriptures were read or expounded : and *Eusebius* relates a famous Story of *Constantine* the first Christian Emperour, that when he made a Speech to him in his own Palace concerning the Sepulchre

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De Vita Conf.
l. 4. c. 33.

of our Saviour, he heard it standing, though it were very long, and would not be perswaded to sit down, saying, *That it was not fit to consult our Ease, while we bear any Discourses concerning God: and that it was more agreeable to Piety, to bear Religious Discourses, standing.* And what would that Religious Emperour have thought, to have seen Christians in publick Assemblies pray sitting? And indeed I have often thought, what shoud be the reason of that univerſal Practice of sitting, when we sing *Psalms*; for *Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving* are as much the Worship of God as Prayer, and therefore equally require a posture of Devotion. Thus uncovering the Head, has at least among Christians, been always accounted an act of Reverence, as pulling off the Shoes was among the Eastern Nations, and therefore becomes the Presence of so great a Majeſty.

But I ſhall not take notice of every particular instance of ſuch Mifcarriages, but endeavour to convince you of the great evil and undecency of ſuch Irreverence in Worship, and that from these two Considerations: 1. The na-
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ture of Religious Worship, especially considered as Publick. 2. From the peculiar presence of God, and Holy Angels in Christian Assemblies.

1. From the Nature of Religious Worship, especially considered as Publick : Now Religious Worship consists in a great awe and reverence for the Divine Majesty : When we are possest with a great sense of that infinite distance, which is between God and us, and our constant dependance on him, which makes us approach his presence with great humility of mind, with a profound admiration of his infinite Perfections, with thankful acknowledgments of his many and great Blessings bestowed on us, and with Souls devoted to his Service and Obedience ; hence Religion is so often called the *Fear of God*, because Religion is founded in a great awe and reverence for God.

So that where there is no true reverence of God, there is no true Worship of him ; and where-ever the mind is thoroughly affected with this religious Fear, it will discover it self in our Words, and Looks, and Actions. Our Souls have the government of our outward

ward Man, and our Passions discover themselves in our looks and behaviour. It requires very great art, either to conceal those Passions, which we have, or to counterfeit those which we have not; for there is such a sympathy between our Souls and Bodies, that they powerfully affect each other; and our wise Maker so contrived our Frame, that though the secret motions of our Minds cannot be seen, yet they discover themselves by those external and visible Impressions they make on our Bodies, without which, Mankind could never know one another, nor have any pleasure or security in mutual conversation. For no wise Man cares to converse with those, who can so artificially disguise themselves, that you can never know, what their inward Resentments are.

Which shews, that according to the frame of our Natures, an inward reverence for God, will shew it self in external Actions; and therefore that it ought to do so; for as God has united the Soul and Body into one Man, so he has united their Motions and Actions too, without which there can be no one perfect act of Religion or Virtue:

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to worship God with the Body without the Soul is Hypocrisy; to worship God with the Soul without the Body, is either impossible, because our inward Passions will discover themselves by some external Signs, when we have no design nor interest to conceal them, or is very lame and imperfect, and unbecoming this state of Life: *We must glorify God both with our Bodies, and with our Spirits, which are Gods;* he made them both, and united them for his Service, and for the same reason, redeemed them both with the Blood of his Son. But we shall better see the necessity of this, by considering the nature of publick Worship; for publick Worship consists in publick signs of Honour; no Man has a Window into our Souls, to discover the secret Devotion of our Hearts; and therefore visible Worship must be expressed in visible Actions, in the external Reverence of our words, and gestures, and behaviour, that is, in such Actions, as express the great humility of our Minds, that great sense we have of the infinite Majesty of God, and our own meanness and worthlessness, and all those Passions and Affections, which become Divine

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Divine Worship: and therefore rude and unmannly approaches to God, such as would not become the Majesty of an earthly Prince, whatever inward devotion we may pretend to, is not external and visible Worship, because it is separated from all external and visible signs of Honour.

And therefore we may observe, that good Men in all Ages have not contented themselves meerly to worship God with devout Thoughts and Passions, but with such external Acts of Religion, as either a Divine Institution, or the Custom of their Country, and the practice of the Church had made external signs of Honour: Such as uncovering the Head, or putting off their Shoes, or bowing the Body, or kneeling, or prostration, or lifting up Eyes and Hands to Heaven, where God dwells. For this we have the ancient Patriarchs, the Jewish Church, Christ and his Apostles, and the whole Christian Church for many Ages, for our example; and it will be hard to find any sort of People in the World, that pretended to any Religion, but took great care of the external Solemnities, and decent Circumstances of Worship:

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I know of no Age of the Christian Church till very lately, wherein those Men would have been allowed to be of any Religion, or admitted to Christian Communion, who should have betrayed such slight thoughts of God in a rude and slovenly Worship, as too many among our selves are now guilty of; and indeed this has insensibly crept upon us ever since those hot disputes about Ceremonies, and the externals of Religion, have troubled the Church: for when Men began to dispute down all good Order and decent Administration of Religious Offices, they soon disputed away all external Worship, and many who still pretend no great dislike to publick Constitutions, are so far infected with this Disease, that they are not sufficiently careful of the Gravity and seriousness of their Devotions; and some are so afraid of Fanaticism, that they dare not look solemnly, nor lift up their eyes and hands to Heaven, for fear of being thought Fanatics or Hypocrites. Thus while some Men out of a groundless fear of Superstition, strip Religion of all useful and decent Ceremonies; and others out of as wild a suspicion

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suspicion of Fanaticism, are afraid to appear grave and serious in their Religion, the publick Solemnities of Worship are either left to every Man's fancy, or performed in so careless and trifling a manner, that the Name of God is dishonoured, and his Worship profaned and scorned.

But my busines at present, is with those of our own Communion, and possibly it may do them some good to tell them, that they who appear so zealous against *Fanaticism*, and are yet so trifling in their Worship, are much the worst Fanaticks of the two. For many of our Dissenters, though they reject the use of our Ceremonies, and neglect that external decency of Worship, which has been in use in all Ages of the Church, yet however they make a shew of great seriousness in their Worship, and seem to be very sensibly affected with it, and therefore this looks like Worship, though it want some external Solemnities, which may be thought needful; but when Men stare and gaze about them, laugh or whisper at their Prayers, and betray great Vanity and lightness of Mind (to say no worse) instead of an awful sense

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and reverence of God, this is so far from making any shew of Worship, how exact soever they may be in their Postures or Responses, that it is downright prophaneness. They are thus far fanatical in their Principles, that they must believe (if they consider any thing) that God does not much regard the Worship of the outward Man, for did they believe he did, they would be more careful to pay it him ; for the bare doing any thing in Religious Worship, such as Kneeling at Prayers, or standing up at the Hymns and Creed, and the like, does not make it so much as an external sign of Worship, unless it be performed with that gravity and seriousness, which is essential to all Religious Worship ; and if they believe, that though God does expect the Worship of the Body, he matters not the Worship of the Mind, nor how carelessly external Worship is performed, so it be done : This is so wild a Principle, that it out-does all the Fanaticks that ever were in the World. Those who were arrant Hypocrites, and yet very punctual in the Externals of Religion (such as the Scribes and Pharisees were in our Saviour's

viour's days) were withal very solemn and demure in those external Superstitions: and those who reject external Ceremonies of Religion, yet pretend to great devotion of Mind, and rapturous ardours and transports of spirit; but these men are for an external bodily Worship without so much as the least visible appearance of external devotion; and (if there be no other Remedy) I wish with all my Heart, that these Men would make a Sect by themselves too, and not reproach the Church of *England* by continuing in her Communion, which has brought a greater scandal upon our Worship, than all the Arguments and Cavils of Dissenters: though the better way would be, and that which I heartily beg of God, and do earnestly beg all Men, to correct this Fault, and to wipe off that reproach of a cold formal Worship, by expressing that grave, and serious, and ardent devotion, which so much becomes all the true Worshippers of God, is so essential to Religious Worship, and so interwoven with all the publick Offices of our Religion, which are admirably fitted to serve all the ends

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of a grave and serious Piety.

2. Let us consider now the peculiar Presence of God and holy Angels in Religious Assemblies: Did we see God in a visible Glory (as he used to appear to Moses at the door of the Tabernacle) every time we meet to worship him, I am apt to think we should all express greater signs of Reverence and Devotion; and yet there is none of you, but will pretend to believe, that God is present in your Assemblies, and that he takes a more particular notice of your Carriage and Behaviour, when ye meet to worship him, than he does at other times; that is, that he expects now, that ye should take a more particular notice of his Presence, and behave your selves with a suitable Reverence, as those who believe that God is present in a peculiar manner, though ye do not see him.

Under the Law God dwelt in the Tabernacle and Temple, which was his House; and therefore when the Tabernacle was finished, God filled it with his Presence and Glory: there was the Mercy-Seat covered with Cherubims, which was a figure of God's Presence, and the Attendance of Angels;

Angels ; and it was a constant Opinion among the Heathens, that their Gods dwelt in their Temples and Images consecrated to their Worship ; and though they were ridiculously foolish in thinking to charm their Gods by some Magical Rites and Mysteries, and confine them to certain places ; yet the original of this, was only a traditional Belief, that God was always peculiarly present in all places of his Worship.

It is sufficiently evident, that the Primitive Christians did believe, that Angels, who are God's Retinue and Ministers, do attend Christian Assemblies, and are Witnesses of the decency and reverence of our Worship : and this is the most plain and obvious sense of St. Paul's words, *For this cause ought the Woman to have Power over her Head because of the Angels* : he was discouraging the decency of Men's praying uncovered, and Women covered, because the Woman ought to be in subjection to her Husband ; and therefore it was undecent to appear with her Head uncovered : and much more so in Religious Assemblies, wherein we are to have a greater regard to decency *because of the Angels*.

¹ Cor. II.
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the Angels, that is, those Angels, who attend our Worship, and carefully observe our behaviour, though we do not see them: and as St. Chrysostom says, *If we reverence Men, much more the Angels of God.* From whence we learn these two things, that the Angels attend our Worship, and that for that reason, we ought to be very careful of all decency and gravity in our Worship.

And certainly did Men heartily believe, and seriously consider, that God and his Holy Angels look on, and take special notice of every Action, and are greatly offended with a light and trifling Carriage, with any Gestures or Actions, which unbecome so great a presence, it would compose them to greater seriousness and devotion, and either make them afraid to come to Church, or more reverent when they do.

{to help M. set up his book}

so you will be satisfied with it
only continuing article of your note

is hard with ~~Replies~~ of Wilson etc.

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telling

C H A P. III.

son and went away to England

at about six weeks ago

Concerning the neglect of the Publick Prayers of the Church.

ANOTHER great Miscarriage, which some are guilty of, who do not forsake our Communion, is a great neglect of Publick Prayers of the Church : A great many come to Church, when the Service is half read, others when it is near a conclusion, and think there is no great hurt in it neither, if they do not lose the Sermon. At other times when there is only the Divine Service read, without a Sermon, few Persons think it worth their attendance, but the Worship of God is exposed to contempt, and the Minister laugh'd at for reading to bare Walls, and empty Seats.

These things, I grant, may happen sometimes, where there is no designed neglect,

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neglect, the mistake of time may occasion some Persons coming late, who want certain notice, and on the Week-days necessary business may hinder others, who are glad to take all the opportunities they can get, of publick Worship; but where there are not such reasonable excuses, the fault is very great, though few People are convinc'd of it; and therefore my busines at present, shall be, to endeavour to convince you of the evil of this Neglect.

1. If you will acknowledg it your duty to worship God together in the Assemblies of Christians, I need not multiply words to prove such a neglect of publick Prayers to be a great fault: for they are the principal part of the Divine Worship: there we confess our Sins to God, and beg his Pardon, and receive a Ministerial Absolution from the mouth of his Minister; there we praise him in Divine Hymns and Anthems, and put up our joint Petitions and Thanksgivings to him; and this is properly Divine Worship, because it is our address to God in Supplications, Prayers and Praises. To hear the Word of God read or preach'd,

ed, is so far an act of Worship too, as it signifies an acknowledgment of his Authority over us, and our desire to be instructed by him: but this is but a secondary act of Worship, which consists in hearing God speak to us, either immediately in his inspired Word, or mediately by those Men whom he has authorized and qualified for the instruction of his Church: but the Worship of God properly consists in our offering something to God, the Sacrifices of Prayers and Thanksgivings, which are highly pleasing to him, when they are offered up by a devout Soul, in the Name and Merits of our great High Priest and Mediator Jesus Christ.

So that those, who neglect the Prayers of the Church, neglect publick Worship; and those who slight the opportunities of publick Prayers, when there is no Sermon to invite their presence, plainly discover, that they prefer pleasing their curiosity, with hearing some new discourse, before the more solemn acts of Worship, which is a great sign, that they hear to every little purpose, when the end of hearing is Practice, and the most excellent part of practical Religion is the immediate

mediate Worship of God.

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2. Because some Men think, they worship God sufficiently, if they come time enough to Church to join in the Pulpit Prayer, I would desire them to consider, that Church-Communion principally consists in joining in the Publick Prayers of the Church. These Men would not be thought, nor do they intend to renounce the Communion of our Church, and yet in effect do so, while they neglect its Publick Worship; for Church-Communion consists in meeting together for publick Acts of Worship, and then we join in the publick Worship of the Church, when we worship God according to the Rule and Form prescribed by the Publick Authority of the Church, wherein we live. The Prayer of the Minister, before Sermon, is not so expressly provided for by our Rubrick, though it be favoured by a Canon made for that purpose, and is now usefully introduced by long custome with the connivance, if not the express allowance of our Governours, but the Liturgy is the Form of Publick Worship, and Administration of Sacraments, there the Church offers up more especially

sially her publick Prayers and Praises, this is the great Bond of Church-Communion, and to neglect or withdraw our selves from this Worship, is in effect to forsake the Communion of the Church, as to the principal part and exercise of it.

When you join in the Pulpit-Prayer, though it be never so well composed, grave and serious, pious and ardent, yet it looks more like the Worship of a particular Congregation, than of the Church, for you join only with those, who are present at such a Prayer ; but when we offer up our Souls to God in that publick Form of Prayers prescribed by publick Authority, we join with all the Congregations of *England*, who at the same time offer up the same Prayers and Praises in the same Words, as if they were but one Congregation, and had but one Heart and Mouth ; and those Men, do not understand the Reason and Nature of publick Worship, who make light of this.

Why is the Worship of a Religious Assembly more acceptable to God, than the private Devotions of good Men, when they might as well stay at home,
and

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and about the same hour (which in ancient times was observed for private as well as publick Devotion) offer up their private Prayers to God for themselves and one another ; for God can hear them all, where ever they are, and their Prayers may ascend up to Heaven together ; and this one would think should be as acceptable and prevalent, as to pray to God in a great company : and yet we see that our Saviour has instituted publick Assemblies for Worship, has appointed his Ministers to offer up the publick Prayers of the Congregation to God in his Name, has confined his more peculiar presence and favour to such Assemblies ; and one great reason of this is, that he is pleased with the Unity and Uniformity of Worship ; for he hath expressly promised, *That if two of you shall*

*Mat. 18. 19, agree on Earth, as touching any thing they
20. shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father, which is in Heaven : for where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.* This is the fundamental Charter of Christian Assemblies, and the reason of it certainly is stronger, the more universal the consent and agreement is :

is: for if Christ will be present with two or three, who assemble in Christian Love and Charity, and agree to put up the same Petitions to God, much more when so many Christian Churches are confederated in the same Worship, and offer up the same Prayers and Thanksgivings to God in the same words. How powerful will the united Prayers of a whole National Church be to procure those Blessings for us which we want. For if unity and consent in Worship be so pleasing to God; the greater this consent is, the more pleasing it must be.

Especially considering, that in this case, we have not only the consent and agreement of private Christians in such acts of Worship, but are confederated by the publick Authority of the Church, and therefore such publick Worship has the beauty and advantages of publick Order and Government. If the Prayers of a particular Minister of Religion be so prevalent, how much more those Prayers, which have the stamp of Church-Authority, which are the Desires and Petitions of the whole Church, even when they are offered up by a single Minister; which

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which cannot so well be said of any Prayer of his own : and if we believe that **God is the God of Peace and Order in the Church**, we cannot but think it very acceptable to him, to observe good Order in our Religious Worship.

Did Men seriously consider these things, they would be soon sensible of the great advantage of such publick Forms of Prayer, and prefer the Prayers of the Church, before any Prayers of a private composition, or any sudden *extempore* effusions. For publick Prayers, prescribed by publick Authority, and offered up by a publick Minister, are always in the Communion of the Church, and virtually contain the Desires and Petitions of the whole Church.

CHAP.

C H A P. I V.

*Concerning the publick Administration
of Baptism.*

ANother great miscarriage of those, who live in the Communion of our Church, concerns the administration of Baptism: Publick Baptism is now very much grown out of fashion; most People look upon it, as a very needless and troublesome Ceremony, to carry their Children to the publick Congregation, there to be solemnly admitted by Baptism into the fellowship of Christ's Church. They think it may be as well done in a private Chamber, as soon as the Child is born, with little company, and with little noise.

As prevailing as this custom now is, it is of a very late date, even in this Church: It seems to owe its original to the disputes about Ceremonies: for

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when some men scrupled God-Fathers and God-Mothers, and the use of the Sign of the Cross, to avoid this, they baptized their Children privately at home without either, when they could meet with such a conscientious *Conformist* as could dispence with his Rule. And when the Church of *England* was pulled down, and the use of the Liturgie and Ceremonies forbid; those who still retained their reverence and Obedience to the Constitutions of the Church, and would not partake in the prevailing Schism, were forced to retire into private too, and to baptize their Children at home; and it is a hard thing to break a Custom, upon what occasion soever it was at first begun. That, which necessity occasioned, is continued by some, as a piece of State, by others to save charge and trouble, which might be much better saved by publick Baptism; by others, out of softness and tenderness; a kind and indulgent Mother dares not expose a young Infant to the cold Air, unless it be to sent it to Nurse.

I could never hear any thing pleaded for this practice, that deserved an answer; that which makes this Custom prevail,

prevail, is, that men do not consider the great decency and fitness, and the many advantages of publick Baptism, which I shall therefore now briefly represent.

By publick Baptism, I mean that, which is administered in the publick Congregation, and in the publick place of Worship: and the fitness and advantage of this will appear, if we consider some few things.

1. That Baptism is our solemn admission into the Christian Church, and therefore ought to be administered in the publick Congregation. Baptism makes us Members of the Body of Christ, and unites us to the society of Christians, and therefore is of a publick nature, and therefore ought to be administered publickly. For there is no other rule, I know of, whereby to determine the manner and circumstances of any action, but to consider the nature of it: there are some actions, which are more proper to be done in private; others, which require some publick solemnities: and it is as undecent to do a publick action, *e. i.* an action of a publick nature, privately, as it is to do a private action in publick.

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Now that is certainly of a publick nature, which concerns a whole society, and such is the admission of Church-Members, and therefore ought to be done in the presence, as well as by the authority of the Church. The efficacy indeed of Baptism depends upon the Institution of Christ, and therefore when it is rightly administered, does not lose its virtue, for want of some due Circumstances ; but it is a great fault in those, who wilfully and obstinately refuse to give all Christian Offices their due solemnity.

2. We may consider, that Baptism contains a publick Profession of our Faith in Christ : it is a publick owning of his Religion : no adult person was ever admitted to Baptism without a profession of his faith in Christ : in allusion to which, as learned Men think, St. Peter calls Baptism, *not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good Conscience towards God.* The person to be baptized being examined about his Faith in Christ, and resolutions of obeying him.

1 Pet. 3. 21.

Now the profession of our faith, the more publick it is, the more agreeable is it to the nature of Baptism, and the constitu-

constitution of the Christian Church, which is a visible Society professing the Faith of Christ: and though indeed Infants, who are baptized, are not capable of making such a publick profession of their faith, yet their Sponsors and Sureties are, who undertake for their education in the Christian Faith: and certainly the publick Church is the most proper place for such a publick profession.

To baptize our Children privately, looks as if we were ashamed of the Christian profession; and there is not a more effectual way to root out Christianity, than to destroy all the publick Solemnities of Worship.

3. Publick Baptism is very much for the edification of the Church: It minds Christians of their Baptismal Vow, which I fear too many are apt to forget; it puts good thoughts into them, when they see, what a grave and serious thing it is to be a Christian; it sets their Consciences on work, to review their past lives, and to consider how they have kept their Baptismal Vow: it minds Children and Servants of their duty, who are seldom at private Baptism, and are

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many times more affected with such a sight, than with the best counsels. It minds those, who have been God-Fathers or God-Mothers, what charge they have undertaken, which they are to look upon as somewhat more than a complement to a Friend, or matter of ceremony; even a trust, and a trust of the highest nature, an obligation to God, and to his Church, to take care of the Vertuous and Religious Education of such Children. Which may convince all considering men, of what great use it is, that Baptism should be administred with all the awful and publick Solemnities that may be; and not be huddled over in private, as a thing, that must be done, though it matters not how.

4. For this we have the example of the Primitive Christians, who always administred Baptism in publick places, and in the presence of the Congregation. At first indeed they baptized in Rivers or Ponds, as *John the Baptist* did in *Jordan*, where our Saviour himself was baptized, which made many in the Primitive Church ambitious to be baptized there also, as *Eusebius* reports of *Constantine* the Emperour, though

though he was disappointed in it : afterwards they built Fonts near the Church, then in the Church-Porch, and at last in the Church it self; and never allowed of private Baptisms, but in danger of death.

And to make the action more solemn, they had publick times for Baptism, which in most Churches were *Easter* and *Whitsunday*, when all their Catechumens, who desired Baptism, and were judged fit to receive it, were admitted into the Body of Christians, and made Members of Christ and of his Church.

And thus it continued in following Ages, and so it ought still to be, according to the *Rubrick* of our Church (I mean as to the publick Administration of Baptism, though it be not now confined to such certain times) which allows of no private Baptisms, but in danger of death: So that this is a plain transgression of the Rule, and therefore such a disorder, as no man should be guilty of, who professes himself a Member of our Church.

C H A P. V.

*Concerning the publick Instruction of
Youth.*

A Nother great miscarriage is, that few men are so ready and careful, as they ought to be, to submit their Children and Servants to publick Instructions. Of what mighty concernment the Religious and Virtuous Education of Youth is, I need not tell you ; for in a great measure their happiness in this World and in the next depends on it : when Children are brought up in ignorance and folly, it lays a foundation of Atheism and Debauchery in their riper years. Unless they be taught to know and to fear God betimes, they are in great danger of laughing at God and Religion, and *making a mock of Sin*, as they grow in years and wickedness, I doubt not but the Atheism and lewdness of this present Age,

Age, has been as much owing to the miscarriages of Parents and Gover-nours in the Education of Children and Youth, as to any one cause besides. How many Children have never been taught any other Catechism than some flattering Complements, modish Oaths, and obscene talk? How many have been instructed in profane and impious Jests, and all the topicks of irreligious Wit? and no wonder, there are so many great Proficients who are wicked above their age, and can as pertly and confidently laugh down God and Religion, as the gravest and most studi-ed Atheists,

Others are not so industrious to corrupt Youth, but yet take no care to instruct them better, to possess their tender minds with the knowledge and love of God, and true goodness; and then there is no great need to teach them to be wicked. If the ground ben't tilled and cultivated, you can expect no good fruit, but weeds will grow of themselves. Others possibly do take care to instruct their Children in the Principles of Religion, and to train them up to the practice of Virtue; and I only wish there were greater numbers

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numbers of these Men ; we might then hope in time to see the World reformed, and Religion grow into fashion and credit again ; at least the next Generation might see the blessed effects of those seeds of Vertue and Piety, which are sown now.

But there is one great Neglect of very mischievous consequence , easie to be observed among us, and we can expect no great good, till it be reformed ; and that is the neglect of publick Catechizing ; which may be sometimes the neglect of the Minister, but is often the neglect of the People , who cannot be perswaded to submit their Children and Servants to publick Instructions, nor to give any encouragement to it by their own presence and attendance.

That this is so, is too evident, and yet I cannot make any probable conjecture, what should be the cause of this : For,

I. No Man certainly can think it an indifferent thing , whether his Children be thoroughly instructed in the principles of Christian Knowldg : for Knowledge must be both the Rule of Practice, and the Motive of Obedience :

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the Laws of the Gospel must be the Rule of our Life and Practice, and no wonder Men do amiss, who know not what they ought to do ; the Articles of the Christian Faith are the Motives and Principles of Obedience, to enable us to conquer the corrupt Inclinations of our Nature, and the allurements and Temptations of this World ; and no wonder Men are conquered, who understand not the use of their spiritual Armour, who are ignorant of those things, without the belief and knowledge of which, they cannot conquer : Such as the Being, and Nature, and Providence of God ; the Incarnation, Death and Sufferings, Resurrection & Ascension of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God ; the Influences and Assurances of the Divine Spirit, the Judgement to come, and everlasting Life after Death.

Nor is it sufficient, to be able to say over these words, without some competent understanding of the sense and meaning of them ; the Articles of our Creed do not work like Spells or Charms, by the Magical power or sound of words, but as Arguments and Motives, that is, as they convey such a sense of things to our minds, as govern
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our affections, and subdue them to the obedience of Christ ; and therefore no man can be the better for his Faith, who does not thoroughly understand, what he believes,

And though hearing Sermons may help somewhat towards the instruction of Youth, yet this cannot be so effectual, as Catechizing ; for the first Principles of knowledge ought to be taught by few and plain words, and instill'd into them by degrees, as they are able to bear it. There is *milk for babes, and meat for strong men* : to understand the first principles of Christian knowledge is necessary to teach them to understand a Sermon, which commonly supposes some competent knowledge in the principles of Christianity : and the true reason, why so few men understand Sermons, or get any good by them, is, because they never well understood their Catechism.

The want of this careful instruction of Youth, makes them so unstable and uncertain in their Religion, when they come to be men. This makes so many different Opinions and Sects of Religion, that they are turned aside *with every wind of doctrine*, that they are taken

ken with every new phrase, that they fall into such monstrous errors, so destructive to the fundamentals of Christian Faith; for it is impossible an house should stand, which has no foundation: So that all men must acknowledg, that it is very necessary, that Children and Youth should be carefully instructed in the fundamental principles of Religion.

2. I cannot suppose neither, that any considering men should think, there is no need of the assistance of the Ministers of Religion: for the instruction of Youth: this indeed is a duty, which every Parent and Master of a Family is concerned in, to instruct those, who are under their care, in the knowledge and fear of God; but if they think their Minister able to instruct themselves, they cannot but think it reasonable to desire his assistance to instruct their Children.

They call in the assistance of men expert and skilful in several Arts, to teach them those Arts, which they profess, though they have some skill themselves in them; and there is nothing of such moment to them, and nothing it may be more difficult, than to be thoroughly instructed in Religion.

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gion. It requires great skill, and such as every Learned *Rabbi* is not master of, to fit the principles of Christian knowledge to the capacity of Children and Youth.

The Articles of the Christian Faith contain the highest, and most Seraphical Speculations, that ever were taught by any Philosophy, such as the *Incarnation of the Eternal Son of God, who was conceived in the Womb of a pure Virgin, and came into the world in our Nature, and wrought Miracles, and died as a Sacrifice for Sin, and rose again from the dead, and is now ascended up into Heaven in our nature, and invested with great Power and Glory, having all Power given to him both in Heaven and in Earth, a Name which is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, both of things in Heaven, and things on Earth, and things under the Earth; and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father: that when these earthly Bodies shall dye, and rot in the grave, they shall be raised again at the last day incorruptible and glorious.* These are great, sublime, stupendous Mysteries, and yet requires no small skill to know, how to teach such

Phil. 2.9, 10,
11.

such great and mysterious Doctrines to Children and Youth, that they may so by degrees, discover these Mysteries, as neither to blind nor dazzle their eyes with their brightness and lustre, nor yet to remain wholly ignorant of them. The thorough knowldg. of Christianity is not so easily attained, as some Men imagine ; nor is every one, who knows something himself, fit to be a Teacher of others. And therefore though I would earnestly exhort you all, to use the best Skill you have to instruct your Children and Servants, yet this is no reason to withdraw them from publick Instructions : nor can any Man, who understands his Religion, think he discharges his duty to God and the Church, meerly by his private instruction of his Family, when he neglects, or refuses to bring them to publick instructions.

3. For he must consider, that his Children and Servants, who are baptized, are members of the Christian Church, and therefore ought to be subject to the instructions and discipline of it, as far as their age and capacity will permit. They do not only belong to his private care, but to the publick

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publick care of the Church, who is to provide for the instruction of her Children; and to deny the Church liberty to instruct her Children, or not to interpose their own authority to make them submit to it, is to withdraw their Children from the Communion of the Church, after a solemn dedication of them to God.

No good man can with patience think of being guilty of so great a sin, which is a kind of Sacrilege, as it respects God, a degree of Schism from the Church, and very injurious to his Childrens souls.

Especially considering, that there is a more peculiar blessing attends the publick Instructions of the Church, for the same reason, that God prefers publick before private Worship, and is more peculiarly present in Christian Assemblies, than in the families of private Christians, and blesses the publick Administrations of his Word before private counsels.

4. Which may further convince us, that the publick Catechizing of Children and Youth, is not needless, whatever good instructions they may have at home: for besides what I have already

ready observed, that God does more peculiarly bless publick Institutions; there are several advantages in it, which I shall briefly represent,

1. This will make them more careful to improve in knowldg, when they know, they must give an account of such Improvements to the publick Congregation: there will be an emulation between Youth, who shall give the most manly and reasonable account of their Faith; and as they grow in years, they will be ashamed to continue Children in understanding: we see the effects of this shame and emulation in other matters, and when it may be improved to such admirable Advantage in this Case, if there were nothing more to recommend it, it were a sufficient reason to all good Men, who desire the improvement and increase of Christian Knowldg in the World, to encourage and promote it.

2. By this means the Church may take notice of the improvement of Youth in Christian knowledge, which is necessary to their regular admission to higher acts of Communion. Those who are baptized, when they are

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Children, ought not regularly to be admitted to the *Lords Supper*, till they have been Confirmed, and to qualify them for Confirmation, it is necessary, they should in some competent measure understand their Religion, and be able to give a reasonable account of their Faith: and though indeed the Minister and Bishop may be satisfied in this by private examinations, yet this is no satisfaction to the Congregation, with whom they are to communicate, any otherwise, than as they rely upon the Authority of their Minister; but such Young Men will be received with a more universal applause, and sincere joy, to the Table of our Lord, who have given such publick Testimony of their Improvements in Christian Knowledge.

3. Another Advantage is, That this trains up Children and Youth in a just respect and reverence for their Spiritual Guides. This may be thought an inconsiderable thing, and only a word by the by for my own Profession; but let it be for whom it will, Religion never did, nor ever is like to flourish, when the Ministers of Religion are despised, when their Counsel is slighted,

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and contemned. Their Office is to be the Guides of Souls ; and unless Men look upon them, as such, it renders their Office useles to the Souls of Men ; and this is all I mean by a respect and reverence to their spiritual Guides ; to reverence their Counsels, Reproofs and Censures, and to apply to them in all cases which concern their Souls.

Now when Men have been trained up in the knowledge of Religion by their Spiritual Guides, and have found the benefit of their Instructions, it makes them naturally reverence their Judgements, and advise with them in all difficult cases : a thing much out of use now, and we see the sad effects of it in the lives of too many.

4. By the publick Instructions of Youth, those may learn the first Principles of Religion, who are too old indeed to be Catechized, but yet very much want it : it is almost incredible to think, how ignorant many Men are of the very first rudiments of Christianity, who are Baptized in their Infancy indeed, but were never Catechized : all our Sermons are in a manner lost upon these Men, who can never be brought to understand Religion, unless

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you teach them, as you do Children, which would be thought a great affront to their age, and long profession : and therefore the best and modestest way of instructing these Men, is to instruct Children, when they are present, which may be of great use to them, if they be sensible of their own ignorance, and do not disdain Instruction.

I shall add but one thing more, and so conclude this Argument ; that when I speak of instructing Children, I would not have you think, that I only mean, such young Children, as are just able to repeat the Catechism by heart, but are not capable of giving any other answer to what you ask, but what they find in their Books ; such Children as these, are scarce capable of any Instruction, nor can it much edify the Congregation to hear them repeat imperfectly the words of the Catechism ; but I principally mean such young Men, who are capable of Learning, who can understand, what is said to them, and make a reasonable answer, at least with a little help and instruction.

We live now in an Age, wherein it
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is thought a reproach for those to be catechized, who are got out of their hanging-sleeves ; as soon as they are old enough to learn a Trade, they think themselves too old to learn their Religion. . But is Religion then so easy a thing, that every Youth of sixteen or seventeen is past his Catechism ? Is it a greater reproach at such an Age to be instructed in Religion, than it is to learn Arithmetick and Merchants Ac-
compts ?

I readily grant, such young Men ought not to be treated like Children, to be made repeat only the words of the Catechism , as School-Boyes do their Lessons ; but there is a manly way of Instruction, which will not unbecome their Years, but much contribute to their increase in Christian Knowledg ; could this point be once gained , to perswade Parents and Masters to send such to be catechized, as are capable of Instructions, I should not doubt in a short time to see very happy effects of this so much despised and neglected Duty.

C H A P. VI.

*Concerning the great Neglect of the
Lords Supper.*

The last miscarriage I shall at present take notice of, is the general neglect of receiving the Lords Supper: for though, thanks be to God, this practice is in some measure restored among us, and we now with joy observe more frequent and numerous Communions, than have been for many years last past, yet this holds no proportion at all to those great numbers of professed Christians, who neglect it wholly, or communicate very seldom.

Thus to turn our backs on the Lords Table, is a very great reproach to Christianity, and infinitely dangerous to Mens Souls, because the Lords Supper is the most excellent and the most beneficial part of Christian Worship; and

and indeed one would think, that there needs nothing else, to perswade any Man to so advantagious a Duty, but a true understanding the nature of it.

My present Design will not admit of a large Discourse, and therefore I shall bring what I have to urge, into as narrow a compass as I can : and 1. Shew you the great evil and sinfulness of this Neglect, and 2. Examine what are the true causes or occasions, which tempt Men to such a Neglect.

i. The great evil and sinfulness of this Neglect, and the most effectual way to convince Men of this, is by explaining those many Obligations, which lye on us, to a frequent Celebration of this Mysterious Feast.

ii. And I shall first argue from the Command and Institution of our Saviour, which certainly is sufficient to make it a standing and necessary Duty to all, who profess themselves his Disciples.

Now the Institution of this Feast runs in the form of a Command. So St. Matthew tells us, *as they were eating, (viz. the Feast of the Pasleover) Jesus took Bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the Disciples, and said, Take,* Mat. 26. 26,
27, 28.

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eat, this is my Body : and he took the Cup and gave Thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it, for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many, for the Remission of Sins.

Mark 14.

22, 23, 24.

Luk. 22. 19,

^{20.} 1 Cor. 11.

23, 24, 25.

The same account St. *Mark*, and St. *Luke* give of it, and almost in the same words ; so does St. *Paul*, which he received by Revelation from Christ himself.

So that those Men at least are guilty of a very great Sin, who never celebrate this heavenly Feast, if it will be acknowledged a Sin to break a plain express Institution of our Saviour ; and very great numbers there are of such Men in our Church (if at least they may be said to be in the Church) who never received the Lord's Supper, who call Christ, Lord and Master, but do not the thing which he has commanded. And there are two very considerable aggravations of this Sin.

I. That it is his last and dying Command, which usually has great sacredness and authority in it, though it be but the command, nay, but the desire of a Friend : this Command he gave his Disciples the same night, wherein he was betrayed, when he was just about

about to offer his Soul in Sacrifice for Sins, when he was preparing to encounter with Scorn and Reproach, with Rage and Malice, with the shame and exquisite pains of the Cross; and it is an ill requital of the Love of our dying Lord, that we will not obey his dying Commands.

2. That our Saviour by the Institution of this holy Feast, has delivered us from all the numerous, troublesome, expensive Ceremonies and Institutions of the Jewish Worship: he has put an end to Circumcision, Sacrifices, Legal Washings, and Purifications, and the like, and has only instituted Baptism, as the Sacrament of our admission into his Church, which cannot be thought grievous and troublesome, when it is administred but once to a Man for his life; and the Lords Supper, as a standing Rite of Worship; and to deny Obedience to one easie Command, when our Lord has delivered us from such a grievous and unsupportable yoke, is a sign, that as much as Men talk of Christian Liberty, they little value that Love, which purchas'd it at so dear a rate.

Others

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Others there are, who do not wholly withdraw themselves from the Lords Table, but yet think there is no great reason to communicate often ; so they do it sometimes, though very seldom, they comply with our Saviour's Institution, who has commanded us indeed to eat the Sacramental Bread, and drink the Wine in remembrance of him, but has not appointed, how often this shall be done.

In answer to this, I grant that our Saviour has appointed no fixt and settled times for the celebration of this Holy Supper ; but this seems to me a plain Argument, that he has instituted this Supper, as an ordinary part of Christian Worship ; if he had intended, that we should have received these Mysteries only on some set and solemn times, he would have told us so ; but having appointed no time for it, we must conclude, that this is part of that Worship, which he expects from Christians in all their publick Religious Assemblies, when ever they meet together to worship God and their Saviour.

And thus the Primitive Christians understood our Saviour, for they never met

met together for Religious Worship, but this holy Feast was part, and always accounted the principal part of it. In the Apostles days this was done every day, as is generally concluded from that short History we have of their daily conversation, which was spent in the duties and exercises of Religion, that *they continued daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking Bread from House to House, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God* (the proper work of the Eucharistical Feast) *and having favour with all the People.* And we have reason to think it was so in the Apostles days, when it is evident this custom of receiving every day, continued some Ages after: So it was in St. Cyprian's time, and so it was at Rome in St. Hierom's time: and the Apostolical Canons, and the Synod of Antioch denounce Excommunication against those Christians who come to Church to join in other Religious Offices, but go away without receiving the Lords Supper: afterwards, as Mens zeal in Religion decayed, so they abated in the frequent Celebration of this Feast: and from every day it came to once or twice

Acts 2. 46.

Apost. Can. 9.
Concil. Anti-
och. Can. 2.

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twice a Week, or every Lords day till it grew so dis-used, that the Church was forced to make provision by her publick Canons, that every Christian should at least receive the Supper of the Lord three times a year, on the three great Feasts of the Church, *Christmass, Easter, and Whitsunday*. But the Institution of our Saviour confining it to no time, seems to make it an ordinary part of Christian Worship, especially when it was thus expounded by the general Practice of the Apostles and Primitive Christians, who were most likely to understand our Saviour's meaning, that I confess, I am so far from thinking it an excuse for communicating seldom, that I want a fair Apology to make for our selves for communicating so seldom as once a Month, unless the degeneracy of the Age, the decay of Christian Piety, and that little sense Men have of the necessity and advantages of this Duty, be thought a good Apology.

2. For we may consider further, that as Christ has instituted this holy Supper, so he has instituted it as an Act of Religious Worship. It is a Sacrifice of Prayer and Thanksgiving to God, and

and to our Saviour. It is a commemoration of the Sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross, *a shewing forth the Lord's Death until he come*; and therefore is a mysterious Rite of Worship, as all Sacrifices were under the Law. But to explain this more particularly, though briefly, I shall consider this holy Feast, both as it respects God, and as it respects our Saviour.

I. With respect to God: and so we may consider it as a Thanksgiving, or as a Prayer.

II. As a Thanksgiving to God for his great and unexpressible Goodness in sending his Son Jesus Christ into the World, and offering him up as an Expiation and Atonement for our Sins. Certainly it becomes us to admire and adore that Infinite Goodness, which took pity on us in our low Estate, and provided a Ransome and Sacrifice and Redeemer for us; *Who so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have Everlasting Life.* John 3. 16. And when so proper to do this, as when we celebrate this holy Feast, when we commemorate the Death and Sufferings of our Lord, which must needs affect

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Acts 9: 39.

affect our Souls if we be not wholly stupid, with a very paffionate sense of the Love of God: and what more proper Sacrament of Thanksgiving and Praise can we use, than to present him with the Memorials of his stupendious Love, to let him see, that we retain a fresh sense and remembrance of it, that we never suffer it to slip out of our minds, though it is so many hundred years since Christ suffered, and perfected the work of our Redemption: You cannot more effectually praise any Man, than to shew the visible remains and monuments of his Bounty and Charity; as the *Widows weeping, shewed the Coats and Garments which Dorcas made while she was with them.* Thus when we offer up to God the Memorials of Christ's Death and Paffion, it is a visible Sacrifice of Praise, and speaks such kind of language as this; *Behold, Lord, here is the token of thy Love to us, thy own Son bleeding and dying for our Sins, thy Eternal Son, the Son of thy Love, in whom thy Soul is well pleased, dying upon the Cross, a shameful, accursed, lingring, tormenting Death, scorned and reproached of Men, and forsaken of God, who delivered him up*

up into the hands of his Enemies, and left him to struggle with the fears and weakness of Humane Nature, without those Divine and Supernatural Supports, which he now needed most, but least enjoyed. We will never forget such Love as this, we will perpetually celebrate this holy Feast, and offer up the Memorials of a Crucified Jesus, as a Sacrifice of Praise to his Father, and to our Father, to his God, and to our God.

2. The Lord's Supper may be considered as a Sacrament of Prayer; for so the Sacrifices under the Law were always offered with Prayer, which were accepted in virtue of the Sacrifice; and therefore though all Men could not every day attend the Temple-Worship, especially those who lived at a great distance from the Temple, yet the time of Morning and Evening Sacrifices were the usual hours of Prayer observed by pious and devout Men, who sent up their Prayers together with the Sacrifice. Thus Ezra tells us, *At the Evening Sacrifice I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God:* and psal. 141. 2. to this the Psalmist alludes, *Let my Prayer be set before thee as Incense,*
and

*Concerning the great Neglect
and the lifting up of my Hands as the
Evening Sacrifice.*

For since the fall of Man, we cannot expect, that God should hear our Prayers for our own sakes, we can make no Atonement and Expiation for our own Sins, nor offer him any just Compensation for them ; and therefore under the Law, God appointed Expiatory Sacrifices, to be offered by the Priests, who were God's Ministers; and now under the Gospel, God has sent his own Son into the World, to be both our Priest, and our Sacrifice : the Acceptation of our Prayers depends upon the Power of his Intercession, and the Power of his Intercession upon the Merit of his Blood : *For with his own Blood he entered once into the holy Place, having obtained eternal Redemption for us.* We must now go to God in his Name, and plead the Merits of his Blood, if we expect a gracious Answer to our Prayers.

Now for this end was the Lord's Supper instituted, to be a Remembrance of Christ, or of the Sacrifice of the Cross, to shew forth the Lord's Death till he come ; which as it respects God, is to put him in remembrance of Christ's Death,

Heb. 9. 12.

death, and to plead the Virtue and Merit of it for our Pardon and acceptance. It is a visible Prayer to God, to remember the sufferings of his Son, and to be propitious to his Church, his Body, and every Member of it, which he has purchased with his own Blood. And therefore the ancient Church constantly at his holy Supper offered up their Prayers to God in virtue of the Sacrifice of Christ there represented, for the whole Church, and all ranks and conditions of Men. For this reason the Lord's Supper was called a *Commemorative Sacrifice*, because we therein offer up to God the Remembrance of Christ's Sacrifice; and therefore in the ancient Church, the Altar, or the place where they consecrated the Elements, was the place also, where they offered up their Prayers, to signify that they offered their Prayers only in virtue of the Sacrifice of Christ, and that the very remembrance of this Sacrifice in the Lord's Supper by virtue of its Institution, did render their Prayers prevalent and acceptable to God; and therefore in the very first account we have of the exercise of Christian Worship,

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we find *breaking of Bread and Prayers* joyned together. The efficacy of our Prayers depends on the Merit of Christ's Sacrifice, and the way Christ hath appointed to give our Prayers an interest in his Sacrifice, is to offer them in the Holy Supper, with the Sacramental remembrance of his Death and Passion.

2. If we consider the Lords Supper as it respects Christ himself, and is a *Remembrance of him*, so it contains all that peculiar Worship, which the Christian Church pays him as a thankful acknowledgement of his great Love in dying for them; as will appear, if we consider what it is to do this in remembrance of him. For,

1. This signifies to keep this Feast as a publick and solemn Commemoration of our Lord: we ought to remember our Saviour and think of him as often as we can; but this holy Feast is a publick celebration of his Fame and Memory: we must not only think of our Saviour, as we do of an absent Friend, who is very dear to us, but we must remember him as some Nations do their publick Patrons, and Benefactors, with solemn and festival Joys.

The

The Lord's Supper is a Feast instituted in honour of our Saviour; where-in the whole Church must call to mind his noble Acts, and shew forth his praises, and perpetuate the memory of them from one generation to another: We must call to mind his great and astonishing Love, and recount all his victories and triumphs over Sin, and Death, and Hell, and *him who had the power of Death, that is the Devil.* We must sing praises to the Lamb of God, who was slain, and is worthy to receive Power, and Riches, and Wisdom, and Strength, and Honour, and Glory, and Blessing. This is the proper work of a Religious Feast; to call to mind the Works of God, and ascribe unto him the Glory due unto his Name.

This is the true reason of all Religious Festivals. The Seventh-Day-Sabbath was originally instituted in Honour of the great Maker of all things, who finished the Creation of the World in six days, and rested on the seventh; and was changed to the first day of the week in remembrance of the Work of our Redemption, and the Resurrection of our Saviour from the dead. The Feast of the Passover

Concerning the great neglect

was for a Memorial of that Deliverance the Children of *Israel* had from the destroying Angel, who smote all the first-born of the *Egyptians*, but spared their Houses ; which was but an obscure type of our greater Deliverance by Christ, of which the Lord's Supper is instituted as a perpetual Memorial. All these holy Feasts were *for a Remembrance* ; that is, to call to mind the wonderful Works of God, to praise his great Name, and by a contemplation of his Wisdom, Goodness, and Power, in making and governing the World, to inflame our Souls with Love, and Joy, and Wonder, till our Thoughts and Passions grow too big and vehement to be suppressed in our own Breasts, but break forth into publick Songs of Praise and Thanksgiving.

And thus we must remember our Saviour in this holy Feast, by making publick, thankful, and joyful Acknowledgments of his great and mysterious Love, and all the mighty Things he hath done for the Redemption of Mankind. When our Saviour sayes, *Do this in remembrance of me :* he requires us to keep this Feast with publick expressions of that Love and Honour
which

which we bare to his memory ; as a testimony of our thankfulness to him for all that he hath done and suffered for us : as a profession of our Faith and Hope, and Trust and Affiance in a Crucified Jesus ; that we own him for our Lord and Saviour, and are not ashamed of his Cross, nor afraid of any sufferings for his sake.

2. The Lords Supper is the peculiar Worship of Christ, considered as a God incarnate : *the Word* was made Flesh, and dwelt among us ; the Eternal Son of God, the uncreated Wisdom of the Father came down from Heaven, and cloathed himself with Flesh and Blood, and became Man, as we are, that he might be capable to dwell among us, without that terrour and astonishment which his unvailed Glory carries with it, which is too bright and dazzling for mortal Eyes to gaze on ; and that when He had lived here a poor despised afflicted Life, in the condition of a Minister and a Servant, He might die as a Sacrifice for our Sins : This is represented to us by Bread and Wine, that he was Flesh and Blood as we are, *that Bread of life which came down from Heaven, to give life unto the World.*

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This is a great and stupendious Mystery, which the Angels themselves desire to pry into, the lowest condescension of Eternal Love, but the highest advancement of humane Nature above the Glory of Angels into a union with the Deity it self.

How should our Souls triumph in God-Man, a Saviour of our own race and stock, and with a little variation sing the Song of the Blessed Virgin;

My Soul doth magnifie the Lord, and my Spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour, for he hath regarded the low estate of our nature; for behold from henceforth all Generations, even the Angels themselves, shall call us Blessed; for he that is Mighty hath done great things to us, hath magnified us, hath greatly exalted us, and holy for ever blessed and glorified be his Name.

How zealous should we be to advance his Name and Praise, who debased, who humbled, who emptied himself, and made himself of no reputation for our sakes: when he suffer'd so low a debasement by becoming Man, and hath so greatly exalted us by it, does it not become us in this Holy Feast to advance his Name, to sing his Praise,

of the Lords Supper.

to publish his condescending Love, and with a greater Passion and Wonder adore the Deity cloathed with our Nature ? how should our Hearts leap within us, when we see such a visible representation of an humble and incarnate Deity, when we see that Mysterious Bread and Wine, which represents to any eye of Faith a God Incarnate, a God cloathed with Flesh and Blood, a God in the Nature, and subject to all the sinless weaknesses and Infirmitieis of a Man ? Oh amazingand surprizing sight ! which does as much puzzle our Passions as our Faith, and is as much too big for our Love, and Joy, and Wonder, as it is for our finite and narrow understandings : and yet oh how pleasant it is to be lost in the Contemplation of such Love and condescension as this : to find an object too big for our highest Raptures and Extasies of Devotion ! where we launch out beyond the Sphere of Words and Thoughts, and are swallowed up in silence and wonder. This is one great design of the Lords Supper, that we may celebrate the Praise and Glory of an incarnate God.

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3. The Lord's Supper is the proper Worship of a Crucified Saviour, for here we see his Body broken, and his Blood shed for our Sins; it is a Feast upon the Sacrifice of the Cross, wherein we visibly declare and profess our Faith in a Crucified Saviour, and return him our joyful Praises, for his great Love in dying for us; here we offer up our Selves, Souls and Bodies to him, as the purchase of his Blood; Souls fired with Zeal and Devotion, and transported with a passionate admiration of his dying Love; a Love without any bounds or measure, without precedent or example; a Love stronger than Fear, or Shame, or Death; a Love which had no cause but it self, which did not find, but make its object, which pitied us when we did not pity our selves, which suffered such hard, such unsufferable usage from the hands of sinners, to deliver them from those punishments, which they had deserved from God: and can we do less than love him, who hath loved us first; than live to him, who hath died for us; and give up our selves to be governed by him, who gave himself a ransom for us?

Blessed

Blessed Jesus! thou hast conquered, thou hast captivated us by thy astonishing Love, we are thine, we give up our selves to thee, take the intire possession of us; we lay our selves and our dearest concernments at thy feet, use us as thou pleaseſt; we have no greater ambition than to ſerve thee, and to advance thy Name and Glory, whether in life or death, riches or poverty, honour or disgrace; we will follow thee whitherſoever thou leadest us, though it be to the Cross, and through the valley of the shadow of death, and will rejoice that we are accounted worthy to ſuffer shame for thy ſake, and account the reproach of our Lord greater riches than all the treasures of this World.

Nay in this Feaſt we do not only admire and praise his dying Love, but extol his Power and Conquest over Death; that he was dead indeed, but is alive, and hath the Keys of Hell and Death. Our Lord is riſen again, and become the first-fruits of them that ſleep; and now in the death of our Sa- viour we ſee the Eternal Conquest of Death and the Grave; for by death he hath destroyed him, who had the power of Death, that is the Devil, and delivered them who through fear of Death were

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1 Cor. 15.

were all their life time subject to bondage : O Death, where is thy Sting ! O Grave, where is thy Victory ! thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. At this Holy Table we feast on the spoils of Death, this is that Bread which giveth life to the World, by putting an end to Death, and becoming the principle and earnest of Immortality : Glory be to this mighty Conquerour, whom all the Powers of darkness could not detain Prisoner : this is our Crucified Lord, who died with scorn and ignominy, but rose again with Glory and Power, we do not eat the Sacrifices of the Dead, but feed on a living Saviour.

So that you see the Lord's Supper contains in it self, or is admirably fitted to all the parts of Christian Worship, which is no more than expressing that in words and actions, which is represented by visible signs in this holy Feast ; we cannot beg of God the pardon of our Sins, or any Blessings which we want either Temporal or Spiritual, but in the merit of that Sacrifice which is here represented ; the proper subject of Christian Praises and

and Thanksgivings is the work of our Redemption, and the Worship of an Incarnate and Crucified Saviour must relate either to his great humility and condescension in becoming Man, his great Love in dying for us, or the Glory of his Resurrection, and that Power to which he is now advanced at the right hand of God, all which is either signified or represented in the Supper of our Lord; and therefore that question, how often we should communicate at the Lord's Table? is easily answered by another, how often we are bound publickly to Worship God, and our Saviour Christ? for the Lord's Supper being instituted by our Saviour, as a sacred and venerable Rite of Worship (for so I must beg leave to call it, for want of a more proper name) and fitted to all parts of Christian Worship, ought to be as often repeated as we worship our Saviour, and publick Worship is very lame and imperfect without it.

For if it be urged, that it is sufficient to pray to God in Christ's Name, and to praise him for that wonderful Manifestation of his Goodness in all the parts of the work of our Redemption

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demption, without using those visible signs, I would fain know to what purpose they were instituted by our Saviour; if Christian Worship be compleat and perfect without it, it is and ever was as needless an addition as most Christians now think it to be, which, I think, derogates very much from the Wisdom of our Saviour in its Institution.

We ought not to look upon the Supper of our Lord only as a particular act of Worship, but as an external and sensible rite of Worship, which is fitted to all parts of Christian Worship, and by the institution of our Saviour necessary to give virtue and efficacy to them, as the oblation of Sacrifices under the Law, did to those Prayers which were offered with them.

Now suppose that any Man should have argued thus under the Law; that if Men prayed devoutly to God, though they offered no Sacrifice they should be accepted by him; I doubt this would have been called despising *Moses's Law*, and such Men must have died without Mercy, though they had prayed never so devoutly; and yet the Apostle tells us, that we ought

ought to have greater regard to the Laws and Institutions of Christ, than the Jews had to the Law of Moses.

The great danger then of neglecting the Lords Supper, is, that such a neglect may render all our Worship unacceptable to God: a right to Christ's Sacrifice upon the Cross, is by the Institution of our Saviour conveyed in the Sacrament of the Lords Supper; and therefore though we pray in Christ's Name, if we neglect his Institution, whereby the virtue of his Sacrifice is conveyed to our prayers, we must pray without any interest in his Sacrifice, and we may easily guess of what worth such prayers are; just as much as our own good works, without an Expiatory Sacrifice to recommend them to God.

The serious consideration of this, thoroughly convinces me how highly useful (not to say necessary) it is to restore the Apostolical and Primitive practice, to celebrate the Lords Supper as often as we meet for publick Worship, if we would have our Worship true Christian Worship according to our Saviours own Institution, as understood and practised by the Apostles themselves.

3. Another

Concerning the great Neglect

3. Another obligation to a frequent receiving the Lords Supper is, that this is the principal act of Communion with Christ. There is nothing more frequently talked of, than our Union to Christ, and our Communion with him, which is the great Mysterie of our Religion, and the great Foundation of our Hope. Now Union to, and Communion with Christ, may either be considered as a constant state and relation, and so it signifies being Members of the Body of Christ, by being incorporated into his Church by a visible Profession of our Faith in him, ratified and confirmed by Baptism, and by the communication of his Grace and Spirit, which dwells in the sincere Disciples of Christ, as the bond of a spiritual Union and an abiding principle of Sanctification and Holiness; or it may be considered as an Act, and so it is most properly applyed to the Lords Supper, which is the most visible External Symbol of our Communion with Christ, and instituted as a Sacrament of Union, for the conveyance of all Divine and Spiritual Blessings to us. And for the explication of this, I shall observe two things in

in this holy Feast; 1. That it is our eating at the Table of our Lord, and 2. That it is our feeding on the Body of Christ.

1. In the Lord's Supper we eat at the Table of our Lord: for this is a Feast of Christ's own appointment, instituted by him on purpose to commemorate his Death and Sacrifice upon the Cross: and so answers to the Institution of God under the Law, to feast upon Sacrifices: which was constantly observed in Peace-offerings, of which, part was burnt upon God's Altar, part belonged to the Priests, and part was eaten by the Sacrificers, or those Persons who offered the Sacrifice of Peace-offerings, who are therefore said to partake of the Altar: Behold, Israel after 1 Cor. 10. 18 the Flesh: are not they which eat of the Sacrifices, partakers of the Altar? To partake of the Altar, signifies to partake with God, whose Altar it is, that is, to have part with him: for part of the Sacrifice was burnt upon the Altar, or given to the Priests, and that was God's part or share, and the other part was eaten by themselves.

Thus it was amongst the Heathens also, who used to feast on the Sacrifices which

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which they offered to their Gods : and sometimes invited their Christian neighbours to these Feasts, who not sufficiently understanding the nature of such Religious Feasts, many times went as to common friendly entertainments, and therefore are corrected by the Apostle for it, as utterly inconsistent with their Christian profession ; for to eat of a Feast upon a Sacrifice, is to have communion with that Being, whatever he is, to whom the Sacrifice is offered : Now the Gentiles sacrificed to Devils ; and therefore to eat of such Sacrifices, is to partake with Devils, to be in confederacy and communion with them. *But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to Devils, and not to God, and I would not that ye should have fellowship with Devils,* howevers, that you should be Communicians with them : *Ye cannot drink the Cup of the Lord, and the Cup of Devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lords Table, and the Table of Devils :* that is as irreconcileable to eat at the Table of Christ and of the Gentile Sacrifice, as it is impossible to unite Christ and false Heathen Gods.

1 Cor. 10.
20.

v. 21.

From whence we learn, that to eat
of

of the Lord's Table ; that is, of the Christian Feast of the Lord's Supper, is to partake with Christ, or to have Communion with him, as to eat of the Sacrifices under the Law, was to partake of the Altar, or to eat of Pagan Sacrifices, was to partake with Devils. Now in general, there were two things signified by these Religious Feasts.

1. A Covenant relation, that such persons who feasted at God's Table were in Covenant with him : for all solemn Covenants even between Men in the Eastern Countrey, were made and ratified by Sacrifice ; thus it was in the Covenant between *Jacob* and *Laban*, and *Jacob said unto his Brethren, Gather stones* ; and they took stones and made an heap, and they did eat there upon the heap. And what this eating was, we may conclude from the nature of the action, which was confirming a Covenant, and therefore this eating is eating a Sacrifice, as we are more expressly told, *Then Jacob offered Sacrifice upon the Mount, and called his Brethren to eat Bread, and they did eat Bread and tarried all night upon the Mount.* And thus it is especially be-

Gen. 31:46

v.54:

A & tween

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Heb. 9. 18,
19, 21.

Psal. 50. 5.

tween God and Men : thus we know the *Mosaical Covenant* was confirmed by the Blood of the Sacrifice : as *the first Testament is said to be dedicated by Blood, and the Book and all the People, the Tabernacle and all the Vessels of the Ministry, were sprinkled with Blood* : nay, not only this general Covenant was confirmed by Sacrifice, but all good Men , when they offer Sacrifices to God, are understood to make, renew, or confirm their Covenant with him ; whence is that expression in the Psalms, *Gather my Saints together unto me, those that have made a Covenant with me by Sacrifice.*

Thus the Death-of Christ did ratify and confirm the Gospel-Covenant between God and Men, and therefore the Blood is called *the Blood of the Covenant* ; and to feast on the Memorials of his Death and Passion, is a signification that we are in Covenant with God, and God with us ; that we still own our Covenant, and are resolved still to do so ; it is to put God in mind of his Covenant with us, and us of our Covenant with him ; and if we have been guilty of any breach of Covenant with God, by venturing upon the commission

mission of any Sin, when we have with tears bewailed our Sin, and renewed our Repentance, here we must renew our Covenant, and by approaching the Table of our Lord, declare, that though we are Sinners, yet we are not Apostates, that we still own our Covenant, and by the Grace of God, which we now implore, and hope to receive, resolve to continue steadfast in it, while we live.

And is not this an inestimable privilege, to be in Covenant with God, and to have this Covenant as it were signed and sealed to us, as often as we please, by a Federal Right of God's own Appointment? Especially is it not a mighty Favour for such frail Sinners, who are so exposed to Temptations, and so often conquered by them, to have liberty granted upon their sincere Repentance, to return to God's Table, and to renew their Covenant, and to be received again into Covenant by God? Is it not a mighty affront to God, when he invites us to his Table, as those who are in Covenant with him, to live in so great a neglect of it? Is it not a kind of renouncing our Covenant, when we refuse to own it by
A a 2 such

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such publick solemnities, as he himself has appointed for that purpose?

2. These Religious Feasts signifie a state of Peace and Friendship with God ; and therefore those Sacrifices of which the Sacrificers were allowed to eat, are called *Peace-Offerings* in the Law of *Moses*. Under the Law it was not permitted to them to eat of the *Sin-Offering*, that Sacrifice which was offered for the expiation of Sin; but when they had offered a Sacrifice for Sin, they might then offer a *Peace-Offering*, and feast before the Lord on the Sacrifice, as a token of Peace and Reconciliation with God. And thus it is under the Gospel, Christ offered himself once for all a Sacrifice or Offering for Sin ; and hath obtained eternal Redemption for us, and therefore there is no more expiatory Sacrifice to be offered for Sins ; but when through the frailty of humane Nature, and the powerful temptations of Flesh and Sense, of the World, and the Devil, we have defiled and polluted our Consciences with Sin and Guilt, instead of those particular Sacrifices for Sin, which the *Jews* were directed to offer, we must offer up the Sacrifice of

of a broken and contrite Heart to God ; that is, we must truly repent of our Sins, and turn from them, and arm our selves with powerful resolutions against them for the future ; and then we may approach the Table of God, and receive the Pledges of his Love, and the fresh Assurances of our Pardon and Acceptance through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We do not use to receive and entertain any at our Tables but those who are our Friends, or at least are not our Enemies ; others are intruders, and if they be not turn'd out again, yet must make themselves welcom ; and indeed a Covenant made by Sacrifice always signifies a Covenant of Peace ; and such to be sure the Gospel-Covenant is, of which the Lord's Supper is the Seal and Sacrament, a Covenant of Peace and Reconciliation between God and Men. None ought to come to this Table but the Friends of God, as all holy Men, and all true humble Penitents are ; and such Men shall be sure to receive a joyful Welcome, and all the peculiar marks of God's Favour; for such this hly Supper it self is to all worthy Receivers.

2. In the Supper of our Lord, we do not only eat at his Table, but we feed on his Body ; not as if in a carnal sense we eat his natural Flesh, and drink his Blood, as the Church of *Rome* teaches, contrary to the common sense and experience of Mankind, and without any colourable pretence from Scripture, or Primitive Antiquity, but we eat his Flesh, and drink his Blood, in such a spiritual manner, as they are exhibited to us in the Sacrament of his own Institution. As to explain this in as few words as may be.

The Lord's Supper, I told you before in general, did answer to a Feast upon a Sacrifice in the Jewish Law. And now I add, that it is a Feast upon the Sacrifice of Christ, who died upon the Cross, and bore our Sins in his own Body upon the Tree : and therefore it is called *eating the Flesh, and drinking the Blood of Christ*. For under the Law the Jews did in a literal sense eat the flesh of the Sacrifice, for part of it was burnt upon the Altar, and part they eat ; and this eating of the Sacrifice, did give them a right and interest in the virtue of the Sacrifice, and all the Blessings purchased by it.

Now

Now though Christ died upon the Cross for us, yet he could not in a literal sense give us his natural Flesh to eat ; for he was to rise again from the dead, with a glorious and incorruptible Body, and ascend up in the same Body to Heaven, and there to continue united to this humane, but glorified Body, till he return again to judge the World. This Sacrament of his Body and Blood was to be celebrated in all parts of the World, where a Christian Church should be planted; and though he Himself, *who is over all, God blessed for evermore*, is present also in all places, and especially in all the Assemblies of his Disciples, vwho meet to vvorship him ; yet his Body, though glorious and perfect as a Body can be, yet is but matter still, and therefore confined to one place, and cannot at the same time be at *Rome* and *Constantinople*, nor in ten thousand places at once , more remote than they : and this Sacrament is to be celebrated, his Flesh eat, and his Blood drank, as long as the Church and the World lasts ; and it is contrary to the nature of a Body to be so often eat, and yet continue the same Body ; and at best were the

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thing possible, it would be no better than an inhumane and barbarous Rite, to eat the Flesh of a Man, and of our Friend.

And therefore, since by the Institution of God, a Sacrifice for a Peace-Offering was to be eat, and especially the Paschal Lamb, which was a type of Christ; and that eating did in a Legal sense unite the Sacrificer and the Sacrifice, and convey its virtue and efficacy to him; I say, hence Christ instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood, *i. e.* Bread and Wine, to be eat and drank as the symbols and signs of his Body and Blood, and a Sacramental Conveyance of all the Merit and Purchase of his Death to his sincere Disciples, who feed on him; and therefore the Bread and Wine are called his Body and Blood, because feeding on the Bread and Wine is ordained by him instead of his Body and Blood, and that eating Bread and drinking Wine in obedience to his Institution, and in remembrance of his Death and Passion, does to all intents and purposes as much entitle us to the Merits, Atonement, Reconciliation, and all the blessings of the New Covenant purchased by

by his Death; as eating the Flesh of
the Sacrifice did the Jews to the virtue
of that Sacrifice, whereof they eat.

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And since Faith in Christ is made necessary by the terms of the Gospel to an interest in his Sacrifice, the symbols of Bread and Wine, serve as well or better for this holy Feast, than his natural Flesh and Blood would do; for here is room for the exercise of Faith: We do not see the Body of Christ broken, and his Blood shed, nothing appears to our bodily senses, but Bread and Wine; but by an eye of Faith we see him hang upon the Cross, and bleeding for our Sins, and thus we feed on his Sacrifice, eat his Flesh, and drink his Blood. Bodily eating cannot make us partakers of Christ, but as the Institution of our Saviour has united the virtues of his Sacrifice with the elements of Bread and Wine in this holy Supper, which makes it as much his Body to all the real purposes of a Feast upon a Sacrifice, as if it were his natural Body and Blood, in as proper a sense as ever the Jews did eat the Paschal Lamb, which is all the Church of England means by the *Real Presence*. So then we by Faith eat the Body of Christ,

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Christ, and drink his Blood, when together with our bodily feeding on the Sacramental Bread and Wine, by Faith we feed on the Merits of his Sacrifice.

And this must needs convince us, how necessary it is to communicate at the Lord's Table, as well as to believe in Christ, if we would partake of the Merits of his Sacrifice ; for this Sacramental Bread and Wine is his Body and Blood ; that is, has the Merits of his Sacrifice annexed to it by his own Institution : And as under the Law, it was not enough to offer a Peace-Offering, unless they eat of it , so neither will the Sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross be of any value to us, unless we feed on it in this holy Supper, not only by Faith, but also by a bodily eating of those Sacramental Elements to which he himself has annexed the Merits of his Sacrifice. To feed on the Sacramental Elements without Faith, is no more than to eat so much ordinary Bread, and to drink common Wine ; and to believe on Christ without feasting on his Sacrifice, cannot without uncovenanted Grace apply his Merits to us : for it is evident that Faith in its own nature cannot give us an interest in

in the Merits of Christ : for how does my believing that Christ died for Sinners, convey the Merit of his Death to me ? nay, though I believe that Christ in particular died for me, this does not actually make his Merits mine, but only in the performance of such Conditions, and in the use of such Means as he hath appointed for the application of his Merits to particular persons ; and I see no reason why Men may not as well hope to be saved without Holiness by Christ, as without eating his Flesh, and drinking his Blood in the Sacrament : for Holiness will not save us without the Merits of Christ ; and I know not how we should come by the Merits of Christ, but only in such ways of dispensing, conveying, and applying them as he himself has appointed, and he has appointed no other ordinary way, but this mysterious Supper.

Hence the Apostle tells the Corinthians, *The Cup of Blessing which we bless, is it not the Communion of the Blood of Christ ? the Bread which we break, is it not the Communion of the Body of Christ ?* What does he mean by the *Communion of the Blood, and of the Body of Christ,*

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Cor. 10. 17.

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κοινωνία τὸ αἷμα τὸ σῶματός; the meaning is very plain, that hereby we partake in the Body and Blood of Christ, that is, in the efficacy of his Death & Passion, and if we could do this any other way, or without it, it would be an useless Sacrament, as most Christians seem now to think it is: and therefore I doubt not but our Saviour in that mysterious discourse in *John 6.* had respect to this holy Feast, though not then instituted, when he tells them, *Verily, verily, I say unto you,*

Joh. 6. 53, *Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man,*
 54, 56, 57. *and drink his Blood, ye have no life in*
you. Whoso eateth my Flesh, and drinketh
my Blood, hath Eternal Life, and I will
raise him up at the last day: for my Flesh
is Meat indeed, and my Blood is drink
indeed. He that eateth my Flesh, and
drinketh my Blood, dwelleth in me, and
I in him.

The only Objection I know against expounding this of eating the Flesh of Christ, and drinking his Blood in the Lord's Supper, is, because the Feast was not then instituted, and therefore neither the Jews, nor his own Disciples could possibly understand what he meant. Now there are several very plain

plain and easy Answers to this : as,

1. Our Saviour said a great many things to the *Jews* in his Sermons, which neither they nor his own Disciples could understand, when they were spoke, tho his Disciples understood them after he was risen, when the holy Ghost brought those things again to their remembrance, and the event had expounded them ; such we may reckon whatever concerned his Death, Resurrection, and Spiritual Kingdom.

2. They might as well understand this discourse of eating his Flesh, and drinking his Blood, as they could what he immediately before told them ; *I V.51.*
am the living Bread, which came down from Heaven ; if any Man eat of this Bread he shall live for ever : and the Bread which I will give is my Flesh, which I will give for the Life of the World. For they understood as little what it was to give his Flesh for the life of the World, and how this made his Flesh to be *that living Bread*, as what it was to eat his Flesh, and to drink his Blood : for they both signify the same thing ; and these words last quoted do plainly prove, that he respects the Eucharistical Feast , when he speaks of
eating

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eating his Flesh, and drinking his Blood : for we must eat his Flesh on-
ly as considered as *the Bread of Life*, which came down from Heaven ; and his
Flesh is Bread considered as given for the Life of the World ; and therefore to
eat his Flesh and drink his Blood, must signify the Sacramental eating of it,
as the Memorials of his Death and Passion.

3. Suppose we should understand this eating the Flesh, and drinking the Blood of the Son of Man, of feeding on Christ by Faith, or believing , yet they could understand this no better than the other, it is plain they did not, and I know not how they shōuld : for to call bare believing in Christ, eating his Flesh, and drinking his Blood, is so remote from all propriety of speaking, and so unknown in all Languages, that to this day those who understand nothing more by it but believing in Christ, are able to give no tolerable account of the reason of the expressiion. Now if this place in St. John be meant of the Lord's Supper, as I do not in the least doubt but it is, our Saviour has made it as necessary to us, as we think Eternal Life to be , for he has

has expressly told us, *Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his Blood, ye have no life in you.*

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John 6. 53.

We must not indeed expound these words to such a sense, as to make the Sacrament necessary, even to Infants themselves, as St. Austin did, who therefore administered the Eucharist, as well as Baptism, to Children; which was plainly contrary to the nature of it: for it must be eaten with Faith, or else it is not the Body of Christ to the Receivers, and God does not make any Ordinance necessary to those, who are under a natural incapacity; nay, a moral impossibility will excuse this; when Men are desirous to communicate in all our Saviour's Institutions, but have no opportunity to do it; for God will dispense his Grace in extraordinary ways to all well-disposed minds, when his Providence denies those which are ordinary: but those who do wilfully neglect the ordinary means of Grace, have no reason to expect those which are extraordinary; how God will deal with those who are guilty of such neglects, not out of a contempt of his Institutions, but out of ignorance of their necessity, or a

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superstitious awe and reverence for them, I will not determine.

Having thus proved that we cannot in an ordinary way partake of the Benesits and Blessings which Christ hath purchased by his Death, but by a Sacramental eating of the Body, and drinking the Blood of Christ, to make you still more sensible of the infinite hazard and danger of this Neglect, I shall briefly consider what those Blessings are which we partake of at the Lord's Table, and which we cannot expect any where else. And I shall name but these.

1. The pardon of our Sins. For this was the purchase of Christ's Death, he died for our Sins, and expiated them with his own Blood: and therefore we may observe, that we do not only eat the Body of Christ in this holy Feast, but we drink his Blood, the Blood of expiation, *the Blood of the Covenant, which speaketh better things than the Blood of Abel*: now this was never permitted the Jews to eat any blood, much less the blood of the Covenant, which was sprinkled about the Altar to make Atonement: nay we feed in this holy Supper on a Sin-offer-

offering, nay that great Expiatory Sacrifice, whose Blood was carried into the Holy of Holies, which the High-Priest himself was not allowed to eat of; to which the Apostle alludes in the Epistle to the Hebrews, *We have an Altar, whereof they have no right to eat, which serve the Tabernacle: for the bodies of those Beasts, whose Blood is brought into the Sanctuary by the High Priest for Sin, are burnt without the Camp: i. e. no body was suffered to eat the Flesh of the Sacrifice on the great day of Expiation, which was a general Atonement for the Sins of the whole Congregation; not so much as the High Priest himself, but their Bodies were burnt to ashes.* Now the death of Christ upon the Cross was peculiarly typified by that great Expiatory Sacrifice, whose Blood was carried into the Holy of Holies, as he had discoursed at large in the ninth Chapter, and plainly refers to here; *Wherefore Jesus also, that he might Sanctifie the People with his own Blood, suffered without the Gate:* This is the Sacrifice we eat of, to which he plainly refers in what he adds, *by him therefore let us offer the Sacrifice of praise* (or

Chap. 6.

Heb. 13. 10,

11, 12, 13.

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PART II. the Eucharistical Sacrifice, which is the Lord's Supper) to God continually, that Heb. 13.15. *is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his Name : but to do good, and to communicate forget not, for with such Sacrifices God is well pleased.* Which refers to those Oblations for the relief of the Poor, and other Religious Uses, which were always made at the Lord's Table.

Now what is the meaning of this, that we are allowed to drink of the Blood of the Sacrifice, and eat the Flesh of the great Sin-Offering, and Propitiatory Sacrifice, which the High-Priest himself under the Law was not allowed to touch? I say, what is the meaning of it, but to exhibit and convey to us the full and perfect remission of all our Sins in the Blood of Christ. So that we eat the Flesh of an Expiatory Sacrifice, and drink the Blood of Atonement, and thereby partake of that Pardon and Expiation which was made by Sacrifice; and if we were sensible what the guilt of Sin is, and what will be its Punishment, we should not fail frequently to come to this holy Table to renew the Pardon of our Sins in the Blood of Christ.

2. Another fruit of Christ's Death, which we receive at the Table of our Lord, is the Assurances of his Grace and Spirit ; and the Communications of a Divine Life to us. Hence our Saviour tells us, *He that eateth my Flesh, and drinketh my Blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him* : which signifies such a close and intimate Union, whereby we receive the Communications of his own Life and Spirit from him : and therefore all Christians are said to be *made to drink into one Spirit* : which signifies the Communications of the Divine Spirit at this Holy Table : the whole Gospel-Administration is called *the Ministrations of the Spirit*, as being accompanied with a Divine Power ; much more this Divine Feast, wherein we become one with Christ, eat his Flesh, and drink his Blood, as *Members of his Body, of his Flesh, and of his Bones*, as St. Paul speaks ; and it is impossible the Spirit of Christ should be separated from such an uniting Ordinance, as makes us Members of his Body.

3. By eating the Flesh, and drinking the Blood of Christ in this holy Feast, we have a Pledge and Earnest of Immortality.

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Joh. 6. 54,
57, 58.

mortality. So our Saviour expressly tells us, *who so eateth my Flesh and drinketh my Blood, hath everlasting Life, and I will raise him up at the last day. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that Bread, which came down from Heaven; not as your Fathers did eat Manna, and are dead, he that eateth of this Bread shall live forever.* Where our Saviour gives the reason, why those who eat him shall live for ever, because he himself shall live for ever: though he must die, he was to rise again into an Immortal Life, and an Eternal Kingdom, as the reward of his Death and Sufferings; and therefore this holy Feast is a certain Earnest of Immortality to those who feed on him: and we need not indeed doubt this, since it conveys the holy Spirit to us, as St. Paul tells the *Romans*: *But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal Bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.*

Rom. 8. 11.

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But possibly some may object, That all this which is attributed to the Ho-
ly Supper, we receive at our Baptism,
the pardon of our Sins, the gift of the
Spirit, and the promise and earnest of
Immortality : for so we are baptized
for the remission of Sins, and we are
baptized, as well as made to drink, into
one Spirit : and, those who are baptized
into Christ, have put on Christ ; and, we
are buried with Christ by Baptism into
his Death ; that like as Christ was raised
from the Dead by the Glory of the Father,
so we also should walk in newness of life :
for if we have been planted together in
the likeness of his Death, we shall be also
in the likeness of his Resurrection.

1 Cor. 12.13

Rom. 6. 3, 4.

Now all this I grant to be true,
and therefore Baptism (and not the
Lord's Supper) is our Regeneration,
or new Birth, we are raised into a
new Life, are renewed and sanctified
at our Baptisme, and have the Holy
Spirit bestowed on us, as the Author
and Principle of a new Life ; but the
continuance of this Grace, and the
daily Assistancess of the Holy Spirit,
especially when we have grieved him,
and made him withdraw from us by

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our Sins, depends upon our diligent attendance at the Table of our Lord. It is not enough that a Man is born into the World, unless he have constant Food to preserve his Life: and thus it is with the new Creature; and therefore the Supper of our Lord is Bread and Wine, the stay and support of Life, to signify to us, that these supplies of Grace which we receive at this Feast, are as necessary to our Spiritual Life, as our daily Food is to the support of a Bodily Life: and therefore our Saviour calls himself *the Bread of Life, which came down from Heaven*, of which the Manna was a Type and Figure: Now we know Manna was their constant Food, the only Bread they had; which signified that this Heavenly Manna is the daily support of our Spiritual Life; and therefore we know the Ancient Fathers by *Our daily Bread*, in the Lord's Prayer, did generally understand the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which they called the *α&πτ@ θες*, or the Bread of God. All which may convince us from the very nature and reason of the Institution, that frequent Communions are as necessary to our spiritual growth and

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encrease in Holiness, to repair the decays of our Graces, and to renew our strength and vigour in serving God, and to procure the Pardon of Sin after a Relapse, and to call back the Holy Spirit, when he is withdrawn from us, as Bread is to keep our Bodies in constant repair: and did Men love their Souls, as they do their Bodies, they would no more neglect the Supper of our Lord, than their daily Food.

4. The Lord's Supper is the principal part of Christian Communion, and therefore as necessary as the Communion of the Church is: To debar any Persons from the Lord's Table, is to shut them out of the Communion of the Faithful; and they are never restored to the full Communion till they are restored to the Communion of this holy Feast. While Discipline was preserved in its glory and vigor in the ancient Church, no Christian durst turn his back upon the Table of the Lord, as nine parts of ten now often do: indeed they could not well communicate as faithful Christian People without receiving the Lord's Supper. The Catechumens and Penitents were admit-

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ted to publick Instructions , and to such Prayers as were proper for them ; but they were dismissed when that was done, and not admitted to be present at the Worship of the Faithfull, who were in full Peace and Communion with the Church, the principal part of which was the Holy Supper. Indeed St. Paul attributes the Union of Christians in one Body to Christ, to this Holy Feast : He calls *the Cup the Communion of the Blood of Christ*, and *the Bread the Communion of the Body of Christ*, and assigns this as one reason of it ; *for we being many, are one Bread, and one Body, for we are all partakers of that one Bread.* From whence it is plain , that we are united to each other by partaking of the same Bread ; for we are one Bread, as well as one Body, which placeth Christian Unity in a joyn特 participation of this Holy Feast. This also unites us to Christ, makes us his Body , because we all feed on his Body : The Church is his Body, as being fed and nourished with his Body : which both shews us, how necessary the Peace and Unity of the Church is to give us an interest in the Sacrifice of Christ ; *for the virtue of his*

1 Cor. 10.
16, 17.

his Sacrifice is contained in the Holy Supper, and this must be celebrated in the Communion of the Church ; and withal how essential this Holy Supper is to Christian Communion, as uniting us all to Christ in one Body.

For shame then let not those Men cry out against Schism and Schismaticks, who separate themselves from the Body of Christ in that part of Christian Communion, which is most essential to Christianity : it is a much less evil not to hear a Sermon together, nay, sometimes not to pray together, than to join in all other parts of Worship ; but to break company at the Lord's Table, where, if ever, they ought to appear as one Body, and one Bread : to set up Altar against Altar is somewhat worse, is a greater and more incurable Schism , than to absent ourselves from the Lord's Table : but for my part I cannot excuse those Men from being Schismaticks, who live in an habitual negle&t of so necessary a part of Christian Communion , and could the ancient Discipline of the Church be revived, such Men should know that Christian Communion in any Religious Offices, is a priviledge which

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which they do not deserve, and which they should not have.

Having thus explained our Obligations to frequent Communion in the Holy Supper of our Lord, which I judge so plain and evident, that no honest impartial Inquirer can resist the Evidence of them, and of such great weight and moment, that no sober Christian can withstand their conviction: I shall now briefly consider the second thing proposed, What are the most common occasions of, or excuses for such a Neglect; and though it were easie to think of a great many, I shall but mention two very briefly, as being I think the most universal, and the foundation of all the rest.

I. The first is of that nature, that it is great pity it should have so ill an effect, and that is, a mighty reverence and esteem for this holy Feast. Either they can never think themselves worthy to approach the Table of our Lord, or that they can never be sufficiently prepared for it.

As for the first, it looks like Pride and Folly, to think that we must be worthy of the divine Favours: they must all be acknowledged to be above

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our deserts : How came Mankind to
be worthy, that the Son of God should
dye for them ? and had God advised
with such modest Sinners, they might
have complemented away the Death of
Christ, as now they do the Benefits and
Advantages of it in his holy Supper ?
How great a Saint soever thou art,
thou canst never merit such Favours
and Priviledges as these, for then there
had been no need of Christ to merit
for thee : and how great a Sinner so-
ever thou art, by complying with the
Grace of God, thou maist quickly make
thy self a worthy Communicant. Re-
pent of thy Sins, and heartily resolve
by God's Grace to reform thy Life, and
come to this holy Table, with assurance
to receive those supplies of Grace which
may enable thee to do it.

And as for that great Preparation,
which is necessary to fit our selves for
so solemn an act of Religion, I must
say, it is in this, as in other acts of Re-
ligious Worship, the greater the bet-
ter : but if we consider what I said be-
fore, that the Institution of our Savi-
our plainly proves, that he designed it
for an ordinary part of Christian Wor-
ship, vve cannot suppose that it re-
quires

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quires much greater preparation of mind, than other acts of Religion.

This holy Supper is a sacred mysterious Rite of Prayer and Thanksgiving, which gives virtue and efficacy to our Prayers, and makes them acceptable and prevalent with God. Are you then, when you come to Church, fit to pray to God, and to praise him? if not, you must neglect your Prayers, as well as the Sacrament: if you are, then you are fit to approach the Lord's Table, to give virtue and prevalency to your Prayers.

This holy Supper conveys to us the virtue and efficacy of Christ's Sacrifice upon the Cross, the Pardon of our Sins, and the Assurances of the Divine Grace and Spirit. Now if you be truly penitent, you are qualified to receive the pardon of your Sins, and therefore to approach this holy Table, where it is dispensed: if you earnestly desire the Divine Grace, you are prepared for the reception of it. Come but with a sense of your wants, and with such desires as an hungry Man has of Meat, and here you shall be filled and satisfied; and without such preparations as these, we can neither pray to God

God to forgive our sins, nor to bestow his Grace on us. That I confess, I cannot see, how any Man, who is fit to pray to God, should be unfit to approach his Table.

2. Others think, that there is much greater danger in approaching the Table of the Lord unworthily, than in an unworthy performance of other Parts of Religious Worship ; but for what reason, they think so, I could never learn. *The prayer of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord,* and his sacrifice is no more : It is as unpardonable an affront to God, to pray for the pardon of our Sins in Christ name without true sorrow and contrition, and serious resolutions of amendment, as it is for an impenitent sinner to receive the Sacrament ; to praise God without a due sense of his Mercy and Goodness, differs not at all from feasting at the Table of our Lord, without any sense of his dying Love.

I would not be thought to give encouragement by this discourse to wicked Men to approach this Holy Table ; such Men ought to be carefully turned away from such sacred Mysteries, when they are discovered ; but
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the whole design is to shew, that those Men, who have such clear innocent Consciences, that they dare pray to God, need not be afraid of receiving the Sacrament ; and those who have not, I would desire them to consider what a case they are in : they defile every holy Duty they meddle with, and are in perpetual danger of God's wrath and displeasure ; they cannot ask his Pardon , but they provoke him the more ; for the interpretation of such Mens Prayers, is only to beg a longer liberty and indulgence in Sin : and therefore this is no more 'an encouragement to neglect the Lord's Supper, than it is to continue in a state of Sin and Damnation.

But you will say, Does not the Apostle tell us, *that a Man must examine himself, and so eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup; for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body?* Very right ; but not to dispute the particular meaning of that place, is not this true also of him that hears or prays unworthily ? Does the Apostle say, that there is any greater degree of *W_orthiness* required to receive

ceive the Lord's Supper, than there is to pray to God ? He who is fit to pray to God, is fit to eat and drink at the Lord's Table ; and he who is not fit for either, I am sure is not fit to die. Our right to Immortality is conveyed to us in this Heavenly Feast, as you have already seen, and it is equally strange to me, that Men should content themselves in such a condition, as makes them unfit to receive the pardon of their Sins, the assistances of God's Grace, or immortal Life ; or if they be not in this deplorable condition, that they should neglect that holy Feast, which is the only ordinary instituted means of conveying all these Blessings to them.

F I N I S.

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